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BESSIE
BY
JULIA KAVANAGH



BESSIE.

VOL. I.

B E S S I E.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF

“NATHALIE,” “ADELE,” “SILVIA,”

&c. &c.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

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B E S S I E.

CHAPTER I.

"HAVE you ever been in Fontainebleau?"

The question was not meant for me. The speaker who uttered it was soon lost in the crowd. I did not see his face, and he little knew what visions those words, thus spoken may be at random, evoked in a woman's heart. .

The names of places are like spells in the fairy-tales. Swift as light they bear us away from one spot to another. We were in a room, firmly shut in with walls, and doors, and windows, all fast, and, lo and behold you, we are conveyed in a trice to a wilderness with sand and rocky waste, or to a green forest with the gloom of huge old trees! We sat by the bright wood fire, with the light shining on the pages

of our book; and now we are in a Summer scene. The sun is hot, water is flowing softly on the pebbly banks of a little brook, and birds are singing for us in a tree, whilst shade and sunshine are playing at hide-and-seek in the grass. And then famous places—world-known places which we have seen, or long to see! The Desert and the Pyramids, Rome and the Forum, Constantinople and the Bosphorus—how they all come before us, grand, impressive, or splendid, when their names are uttered! There is no magic like it! Its power may fade away as years come on, for then the walls of home rise higher and higher around us, and hide more and more the bright world of fancy from our view, and the to-day and the to-morrow are apt to be very engrossing; but the spell is still a wonderful spell, and need not be uttered by an enchanter's lips to work its magic.

So it was with me when these words were spoken by my side in a crowded room: "Have you been in Fontainebleau?" I heard no answer to them; I cared to hear none; for, you see, I have been in Fontainebleau, and in that old

Royal town, and within the shadow, as it were, of that grand old forest, began that year of my life which has been the key to all the rest. There it was that the first act in my little drama—have we not all got ours?—took place; the first act without which, though I was only a looker on, a sort of Greek chorus, the other one, when I, too, had to play my part, the great second act which still endures, could never have been.

I was a very little child when both my parents died, leaving me two hundred a year—and bequeathing me to the care of Mr. de Lusignan. He was abroad at the time, but he wrote home to his solicitor about me, and that gentleman placed me at once under Mrs. Dawson's care. "I have three pupils, never more," said Mrs. Dawson. I have been told that she added "never less;" but that must have been a fiction, for Jane and Arabella Wynne left us before my first year was out, and were never replaced. For eleven years I was the only pupil, the solitary boast of dear, good, indolent Mrs. Dawson. She was the solicitor's first cousin, or, better still, his

first love, so she felt quite sure of me ; and as I paid her rent, her taxes, and one of her two servants, she was content that her widow's pension should eke out the rest of her income. " Girls are such a trouble," she said, as if to justify herself for not giving me the two companions I was entitled to. " You can't think how much happier you are without them, dear."

I suppose girls are a trouble, but having no experience of them, I could not think so then. However, with my little lot, such as it was, I felt content.

Life is very sweet and fair to the young. It is a wonderful book, and every page we turn bears its own bright story. There is much sunshine and little shade in that golden age of life.

I knew I was alone in the world—alone, save for my cousin, James Carr, who always called to see me when he came to town twice a year ; and for my guardian whom I never saw, but who wrote to me every now and then, yet, spite the knowledge, I was very happy.

I could not help it ; no more than a kitten can help being frisky, or a young bird can avoid

trying its little weak pipe at a chirrup, and merrily attempting to sing.

Moreover, Mrs. Dawson was a most good-natured lady, and everything about her, from her chairs to her temper, was comfortable and easy. She lived in a pleasant old house in Kensington, and these were the halcyon days when Kensington was an old Court suburb, and had nothing to do with the smoke and din of Metropolitan railways. To this house was attached a little garden, with ivied walls, and a green grass-plot, where a central stone vase, full of flowers, was in bloom from early Spring to late Autumn. That garden the windows of my room overlooked, and beyond it I had a glimpse of the Surrey hills, fading away in the blue distance of a dreamy horizon. I fear that a good deal of my time was devoted to these two windows. Mrs. Dawson never interfered with me. I was a valuable pupil, and she would not have worried me for worlds. She could not bear being worried herself, and as "dear Bessie Carr was sure never to want, why on earth should she be vexed or troubled?" So Mrs. Dawson, who was essenti-

ally a lady of the old school, near whom the abomination of slang had never come, but who had also eschewed many things besides slang, taught me to speak correct English, to write a fair hand, and to play well—for she was an accomplished musician—and piously trusted me to Providence for the rest. Providence came to the rescue under the shape of her brother, a pale little white-haired invalid man, with bright black eyes, a wonderfully-stored mind, and a fiery heart—no other words will apply to him who took me in hand. What I know, be it much or little, I owe to him. I was rather afraid of “Uncle John,” as I called him, for he was irritable at times, and always impetuous, but I liked him too, and thought him a prodigy of learning, a living cyclopedia, which after a fashion he was. Greek and Mechanics, Logarithms and Hebrew, seemed equally familiar to him. He would give you the whole history of the steam-engine at one moment, and quote the Talmud in the next breath. The most varied lore fell from his pale, faded lips, as freely as pearls and diamonds were dropped by the beautiful girl in the fairy-tale,

whose rosy mouth was thought sufficient dower
by a king's son.

The dust of years is lying on your pale face,
Uncle John, but never can I forget the happy
Winter evenings I spent in the warm parlour
of the old house in Kensington, listening to you.
The gilt bindings of the unread books in Mrs.
Dawson's mahogany book-case, the frames of the
pictures on the walls, the venerable chairs them-
selves, all shone again in the firelight, making
everything seem doubly genial and pleasant;
but most genial, and pleasantest of all, was it
to sit on a little hassock at your feet, and hear
you, the most eloquent and wisest of men, as I
thought you then, whilst Mrs. Dawson leaned
back in her chair, and snored with a gentle, lady-
like snore.

I was seventeen when I was called down to
the parlour one afternoon in May. Mr. de Lu-
signan had returned to England, and come to
see me. I was shy in those days, and it was
with a little fluttering of the heart that I opened
the parlour door, and peeped in before I entered
the room. A stream of hazy English sunshine

came in through the open window, and in that pale gold, sitting in Uncle John's favourite crimson chair, with his chin resting moodily on his breast, and his hat between his knees, I saw my guardian. I saw him, as girls see, in a second, and from top to toe. Nothing, from his crape hatband to his brown, ungloved hands, escaped me. Mr. de Lusignan was a short, swarthy, broad-shouldered man, with harsh features, and a pair of quick, dark eyes, that caught mine in a moment, through the chink of the door. A meaning full of fun passed like warm sunshine over his dark face.

“ You may as well come in, Bessie,” he said, composedly, “ I see you.”

I obeyed, feeling both foolish and crimson, facts of which my guardian took no notice. He made me sit down by him, and took my hand and stroked it between his own in a caressing sort of way, whilst he looked at me softly with his big brown eyes. They were very mellow now, and altogether there was a strain of tenderness in him, womanly, spite the essentially manly vigour of his appearance, which had its

charm, and was made to fascinate a foolish young thing such as I was then.

"My dear child," he said, in a voice half mirthful, half plaintive, "what a pity, is it not, that we two have been so long apart? I am sure you would have been quite a comfort to me in my widowhood—now would you not?"

I could not speak, but my heart warmed towards him, and I thought him the kindest of men. Later I learnt the exact value of Mr. de Lusignan's pleasant speeches, and how far it was wise to rely upon them. He was by no means an insincere man. Downright untruth never came near him. He was proud, and scorned a lie. But he was also sensitive, variable, and capricious, so that what he said he really meant when he said it; but seldom for more than five minutes after the words had passed his lips. I was pleasant enough to look at in those days; and Mr. de Lusignan found pleasure, I have no doubt, in making my eyes sparkle, and my cheeks deepen in colour by these kind words, which cost him nothing, and made the poor young creature so happy.

"Well, we must make up for lost time," he continued. "Now, you are to imagine that you and I have been meeting daily for a dozen years or so, and, please, do not be shy—no, don't, my dear little girl! Shyness is such a bore! And I am sure you hate being bored, now, don't you? So you have been learning all sorts of things, have you not? And you have had some cousin of yours calling upon you, Mrs. Dawson tells me. Who is he?"

My guardian still held my hand, and I could not prevent that tell-tale limb from giving a little nervous start as it lay clasped in his broad palm and strong, though supple fingers. In a moment, in a second, the mellow brown eyes were piercing me through and through, keen as gimlets.

"Have you read Plutarch's Lives?" he asked, abruptly.

Youth, in its inexperience of life, is apt to be too literal, so I took some pains to explain that, though I had not read all Plutarch's Lives, Uncle John and I had gone through some of them together, and I was even anxious to

specify which particular lives these were; but my guardian, who wanted no information on that score, shook his head good-humouredly, with a *va bene*, in which, as in other fragments of foreign speech, he indulged himself, through having lived so long abroad; and continued, in a half gay, half serious tone:

“Never mind, dear; what I mean to say is this: in the life of Demetrius there is a pretty story of a young prince who, having fallen in love with the beautiful Stratonice, betrayed his secret to a learned physician, with a long name ending in ‘us,’ by the sudden quickening of his pulse, as this said lady entered the room where he lay. It is a well-known tale; and Ingres has painted a lovely picture about it. I remember very well falling in love with *his* Stratonice myself. Well, Bessie, my dear, I put no questions—I have no wish to pry into your little secrets—don’t tell me anything, please; neither will I be, if I can help it, that dreadful fellow in the old plays—the harsh guardian. But this I do say, whether your hand,” he released it as he spoke, “told me a true or a false story just

now, you shall not marry with my consent—no, not a peer of the realm—till you are twenty-one. So no love-making, no love-letters, *no cousins*, if you please, whilst you are under my care. I will be answerable for no one's happiness, not even for yours, my dear. When you are your own mistress, you shall marry whomsoever you please."

It is said of a drowning man that his whole existence passes before him, as he fights for breath with the stifling waves; and surely this is true of more things than of that desperate struggle between life and death which takes place beneath the dark waters. I was overwhelmed with mortification and shame as my guardian spoke; and yet in a moment, and at a glance, the whole of the foolish past he thus doomed appeared before me. I saw the simple girl who, when her handsome, authoritative young cousin said to her in Mrs. Dawson's sun-lit garden, "You know, Bessie, you are to marry me," answered him "Yes," through life-long love, it is true; but who would as soon have taken off her head as she would have said

him "Nay," because of a life-long fear. Again I saw every meeting; again I heard every word there had been between these two. At the same time, I had visions of a little velvet casket, in which this exacting cousin's brief letters were treasured; of the angry light that would assuredly flash out of his blue eyes when he learned Mr. de Lusignan's decree; of all the days, and weeks, and months comprised in four weary years; of Uncle John's old copy of Plutarch's Lives; of a young Antiochus and a fair Stratonice; and of a kind guardian, who stroked the hand of his little ward, saying the nicest things to her, but who somehow or other made her feel and understand that she was to give him no sort of trouble. All these things, I say, flashed before me distinct and clear, whilst my guardian passed sentence on my girl's love, and after a brief pause resumed:

"I don't see that I have anything more to say to-day, so good morning, my dear. As soon as my house in Portland Place is fitted up, I shall come for you."

He patted my cheek very kindly, and left me

thus. I rushed up to my room, locked the door, flung myself on the bed, and burst into such a passion of sobs and tears as my happy youth had not known before that day.

I cannot tell how long the fit lasted. Length of time matters little. When sorrow has exhausted itself, its manifestations must needs cease; so I raised my head, sat up, and feeling my hair all dishevelled, and my whole being wrong somehow or other, I went and looked at myself in the little mahogany-framed mirror on my toilet-table. I remained aghast at the red swollen lids and blotched cheeks which met my view. I could not have imagined that tears, which read so prettily in the poetry of books, were so very unbecoming as all this in the prose of daily life. I was hideous to look at, and James Carr was coming to town, and might call at any time. If he had been actually coming the next minute, I could not have been in a greater hurry than I was to bathe my eyes and apply violet-powder, as it was called then, to my fevered cheek.

It is useless to deny it. Every girl feels that

she was born of the sex called fair, and does her little best to win unto herself the gracious epithet. All that moralists may preach on the perishable quality of flesh, will not eradicate the feeling. "Mademoiselle, tout cela pourrira," says the austere Jansenist to Madame de Sévigné's beautiful daughter. "Oui, Monsieur; mais tout cela n'est pas pourri," she gaily answers; and so every girl feels. Tell her that beauty is fleeting, that it has scarce a day, scarce an hour, and remind her, if you like, of the worm and the grave; she will answer you with pretty insolence, "Granted, sir; but deny, if you can, that I am charming now, and deny, if you dare, that, wise as you are, you, too, feel my power!"

I was not very pretty then; I was only pleasant to look at, as are so many girls of my years; but that I was, and I confess it, I had no peace of mind and no rest until I had restored my appearance to something like decency. This being done, I went to the nearest window, and looked down at the garden, at the blooming vase of flowers, at the sun-tipped

ivy on the walls, at the soft hazy sky, and the bluish Surrey hills, and I asked myself what I had been making such a fright of myself for, and what my trouble had been all about. What had my guardian said ? That I was not to marry James Carr till I was twenty-one. Well, and did I want to marry him before that time ? Did James even want to marry me ? He was barely more than twenty-one himself ; he had not long come into the possession of a small embarrassed estate down in Yorkshire, and of three little orphan step-sisters as well. His hands were as full of work as they need well be. It was the most unlikely thing in the world that he should want to marry me soon ; but, of course, all his troubles would be over by the time I was twenty-one ; and, of course, he would insist on marrying me on my twenty-first birth-day ; and of course, too, we should both be as happy as the day was long !

Happy youth to be unable to keep sorrow ! —and happy youth to mould the future to its own wishes, as a cunning hand moulds common clay into shapes fair and divine ! Happy youth,

I say, for is not Hope always by its side, holding up that pleasant mirror in which life is shewn in colours which no life—not even the happiest—can ever wear ?

I do not know that I dreamed of a fate above that of my fellow-creatures. James Carr was a dear, good fellow, who was very fond of me ; but, I suppose, there might be bliss more exquisite than that of becoming Mrs. Carr, and living in an old brick house somewhere down in Yorkshire, with three obstreperous little sisters-in-law (who were all red-haired ; dear James was himself a deep gold.) For all this was not in itself the ideal, romantic impossible happiness of a deluded girl's imagination ; but, alas ! ideal, romantic and impossible in so far it was that there were no shades in the picture. Truly, in that future, as shewn by Hope's deceiving mirror, there was no weariness of love in James Carr's heart ; no wonder at a mistake in mine. The grimness of poverty never crossed his threshold, nor abode beneath his roof. No bickerings, no jealousies, no disappointments of any kind, no sickness and no death—gloomy cara-

vans that are ever journeying through the desert of life—entered this favoured oasis in which we were to dwell.

I was young, as I have already said, I was also the daughter of an Irishman, so Hope had it all her own way. For a while, I thought kindly and regretfully of dear James, feeling for his vexation—for vexed he would be; then gradually my thoughts merged into other themes, and I wondered when Mr. de Lusignan would come for me, and what his house would be like. Very beautiful and luxurious, no doubt, for he was said to be a rich man, and to spend some money on works of art and virtu.

Amongst the gifts which I derived from my Irish father, ranked an appetite for the splendid and the marvellous; so I reared a sort of Aladdin's Palace in Portland Place. I adorned it with a lavish hand, and I had wax-lights and chandeliers, and music and dancing, in that home of all delights, and a young Bessie in white muslin, who waltzed with James Carr.

My guardian's house must have been a very beautiful house, indeed, if it took him the long

six months to fit up which passed before he came again to see me. Six months during which I listened rather absently to Uncle John in the evening, as I sat wondering in my simplicity why James Carr never came, and never wrote, and feeling very lonely, and sometimes, too, very sad and very weary.

Mrs. Dawson found out what ailed me, and comforted me after her own fashion.

“Of course, you miss Mr. Carr,” she said, one day; “very natural, though he looks so—so forbidding!”

I had always been afraid of James Carr, but rather than hear him called “forbidding” I was ready to protest that he was warm and benignant as sunshine, so I uttered an ‘Oh! Mrs. Dawson!’ that was intended for an indignant negative.

“My dear, he speaks so sharply to you,” she persisted.

Alas! there is nothing new under the sun. My answer was an unconscious plagiarism of Molière’s beaten wife:—“I like being spoken

sharply to by James; it is a proof that he likes me!"

"Dear me, how odd!" innocently said Mrs. Dawson.

She said no more, nor did I. She knew I was vexed with her, as I was also provoked with James Carr. Was it not all his fault if he was thought forbidding? Dear, good, honest, unreasonable and most unreasoning James! He went forth through the world like divine Una, with a roaring lion and a milk-white lamb. But whilst he tenderly hid the lamb in the folds of his garment, and kept him safe and warm lest cold blasts should pierce him through, he held the lion in so slight a leash that the creature's fiery eyes and grinning teeth frightened all passers-by. I, too, was afraid of that lion after a fashion, but then I never forgot the little lamb that lay nestled near James Carr's heart.

That lion and that lamb were, in one sense, the undoing of James. They helped, at least, to make his life a series of odd mistakes. What the stern lion counselled, the little lamb, as a rule, would not hear of. It would have done

James Carr's temper a world of good if he had been a keen sportsman, and spent some of his exuberant strength in the field ; but his love and tenderness for all dumb creatures would never let him ; and so it was in all things. He was a strict martinet, a rigid disciplinarian, a good economist ; but discipline was forgotten, and the strings of his shallow purse flew open when the poor knocked at his door. They were vagabonds, most of them—at least, James called them so—and the lion would have sent them away with a vengeance ; but their hearths were cold, their trenchers were empty, their limbs scantily clad, and the lamb said they must not suffer or die. In one matter alone did lion and lamb agree. When James got a crotchet in his head, they let him keep it. Both knew they might as well attempt to move the foundations of a city as try to dislodge it from that citadel.

The last time James and I had met, that lamb had had it all his own way, and been quite rampant, if I may so speak of this meek animal. James had come to town with his three little

sisters, and brought them to see me. I have read that

“A lion will turn and flee
From a maid in the pride of her purity;”

but if James Carr’s lion did not fly he did worse—he cowered ignobly at the feet of these three little red-haired maidens; his ears were down, his tail was between his legs; I had never seen so abject a creature. James, of whom I had always been in awe, stood, with regard to these three sisters of his, in the position in which I had so long stood towards him.

Kate and Susan, young ladies of eleven and thirteen, took the poor fellow up very short almost every time he opened his lips.

“I wish, James, you would not tell such stories!” or, “Don’t be stupid, James!” were their mildest comments on his discourse.

Deeds, not words, seemed to be the motto of Polly, an artless little lass of seven, for she boxed and kicked James soundly when she discovered that the said James had nefariously sat on the new doll she had entrusted to the keeping of his pocket. James took Kate’s “Don’t

be stupid," and Polly's kicks with great patience ; I do believe he was used to both arguments. Yet these little tyrants loved their slave. They worried him, and they were fond of him ; but even if there had only been the worrying without the love, it would have made no difference to James Carr. Were not these his mother's children, and but for him must not they go forth and be as beggars on the face of the earth ? And was not this enough to put him in their power for ever ?

Then how could I, who knew him so well, mind the harshness which hid a heart so tender ?

CHAPTER II.

ON a gloomy morning in October I sat alone in the parlour, going through Beethoven's Sonata Pathétique. The day was cold and dull, and I felt very pathetic myself. When I came to the Rondo, which, spite its allegro, is so Irish in sadness and in melody, I was just ready to cry. For oh! why did not James Carr come to see me, or why did he not write?

“Time too slow, but otherwise not amiss.”

I started up, and beheld Mr. de Lusignan's short broad figure and dark face behind me. He had been closeted with Mrs. Dawson in the back parlour for the last half hour, without any knowledge of mine.

“Put on your bonnet and cloak,” he added, as if we had met the day before. “I have come for you.”

I was so bewildered at his sudden appearance that I did not think of answering him, or so much as bidding him a good morning. I went to the door, then suddenly came back and stood before him.

“Please, sir,” I said, very seriously, “is it because you forbade him that James Carr does not come to see me any more ?”

My guardian moved uneasily in the chair on which he had thrown himself, in that careless attitude which says so plainly : “I take mine own ease wherever I may be.”

A nervous twitch as of annoyance or pain passed across his sensitive dark features, and he said hurriedly :

“My dear, I have no time to spare.”

I felt rebuked, and left the room without uttering another word. My heart was full to breaking, as it seemed to me. I knew now why James Carr did not come, and I all but hated my guardian for his cruelty. Why should I put on my bonnet or cloak ? I thought in my room I no longer wished to go to his house in Portland Place. I did not want to cross his

threshold, to sit at his table and partake of his good cheer. I felt like the robber in Ali Baba's story. Mr. de Lusignan was my enemy, and I would rather not to eat salt with him. At length, thinking I had kept him waiting long enough, I made up my mind to go down. I found Mrs. Dawson sitting alone in the parlour.

"Mr. de Lusignan could not wait any longer," she said, with her easy indolent smile, "you should dress more quickly, dear."

"And is he not coming back?" I asked, much dismayed.

"Oh! yes, presently, I believe."

I was so anxious not to keep my guardian waiting a second time, and so fearful lest he should disappoint me again and not take me at all to that house in Portland Place, which in my heart I longed to see, that I would sit with my bonnet on for the rest of the day. But Mr. de Lusignan's "presently" meant a long and entire week of seven days; and I was giving him up in despair, and had made sure I should not see him again for another six months, when he appeared again one evening. He was coming

to take me home to dinner with himself and his sister-in-law, Mademoiselle Aubrey. All I knew of this lady was that she was elderly, and had kept house for my guardian since the death of his wife and her sister, a beautiful French governess, whom he had married for her beauty.

I did not keep him waiting this time. I was too glad to have the chance of seeing the house in Portland Place after all; besides, my anger had been much softened by intelligence which Mrs. Dawson had imparted to me on the day which followed my guardian's visit.

"Only think, my dear," she said to me. "I met Mr. Carr in Oxford Street. It seems Mr. de Lusignan will not allow him to see you, until you are twenty-one. But Mr. Carr and he have had a long talk, and everything is settled comfortably, and Mr. Carr is to write to you."

James Carr did write a brief though kind letter, telling me that he felt Mr. de Lusignan's prohibition very keenly, but that as my guardian did not exceed his authority, patience was our only remedy. So I was not to fret, but to trust in him as he should trust in me, and we were to

be allowed to write to each other every now and then.

This letter made me glad, but it also mortified me. I had always known that dear James was matter-of-fact, but I had not expected that he would take this thing so very coolly. If he bore it thus easily, why should I fret or make myself miserable, whispered pride; and pleasure added, why had I foolishly scorned such relaxation as Mr. de Lusignan was willing to give me. So when my guardian came he found me quite anxious to step into the carriage with him, and quite disposed not to trouble him with unpleasant questions on the way.

I had expected the house in Portland Place to be all gold and glitter, or at least all gaiety and brightness; instead of which I saw a dwelling fitted up with as much old-fashioned grace as if it had come down to my guardian through a long line of ancestors, each generation adding some token of its own as it went by. It was a very rich, a very luxurious, a very beautiful home indeed, but it had nothing new or garish about it. I felt not dazzled and enchant-

ed as I had thought to be, but awed and impressed.

“This way, Bessie,” said my guardian, showing me upstairs, past the open door of the dining-room, where I caught a vision of damask, plate, and crystal, such as I had never beheld before; whilst a delicious fragrance of rich soup, sweeter than perfumes of Araby, stole from the invisible regions below, and assured me that such a dinner as my inexperience knew nothing of, was being prepared for me by the genii of this Aladdin palace.

The drawing-room was vacant, but Mademoiselle Aubrey would come presently, said Mr. de Lusignan, and he bade me sit down. I scarcely ventured to do so; yet in the midst of all this splendour—for such, to my unaccustomed eyes, seemed Turkey carpets, bronzes, pictures, and Buhl cabinets—my swarthy guardian moved like an old gnome—he was fifty-five, but I thought him far gone down in the vale of years—who had conjured it up, and felt too much its master to care about it.

“Ah! here she is!” he said, as the door

opened, and I turned round more quickly and eagerly than good-breeding allows.

I had seen one Frenchwoman in my lifetime. She wore a wig, she was yellow and skinny, and she talked incessantly. All other French-women I logically concluded to be like Madame Dubois. Very different from this sample of Gallic blood was the fair, plump, blue-eyed, and genial lady of sixty who now entered the room, and kissing me on either cheek, gave me a cordial and gracious welcome. I lost my heart to her at once, and shyness fled as she took my hand, and made me sit down on a low couch by her side. Here and there in life we find gifted beings, men and women, richly dowered, and this lady was one. In youth she had been shrewd and wise, and in age she was warm-hearted and merry. Beauty, indeed, she had never possessed, but in nothing else that nature bestows was she wanting; and so, as I said, I fell in love with her forthwith.

“I am glad we have met at last,” she said, very kindly. “It is no fault of mine if we have not met before this day.”

This hit was so evidently meant for my guardian, that I stole an uneasy look towards him; but Mr.deLusignan, throwing himself carelessly on a chair, which to me seemed far too beautiful to be sat upon, said, with a careless laugh,

“Don’t mind me, pray. I have the gift not to hear unless I choose to do so. Please to go on, Mademoiselle Aubrey.”

His sister-in-law did not seem to heed this speech; but I felt much abashed, and, in my confusion, I stared at a picture on the wall before me.

“It is a beautiful thing,” said the lady. “You draw, of course ?”

“Oh! no. I wish I did.”

“Well, my dear, and why do you not ?”

She looked at her brother-in-law as if to lay the blame upon him. I hastened to say that I had been stupid, and never asked Mr. Aubrey.

“De Lusignan,” he corrected, with just a touch of asperity in his tone at my little mistake. I felt more and more abashed, and stammered an apology; but the two names

being French, and this having confused me—

“How do you know De Lusignan is a French name?” he shortly interrupted. I felt that he wanted to drive me at bay, so I took courage, and recovering my composure, I said,

“I beg your pardon, sir. I had been told that you were descended from a Huguenot family of Anjou.”

Mr. de Lusignan sat straight up in his chair, and looking me full in the face, he said gravely,

“I am descended from Melusina, who was half a fairy, half a fish, and half a woman—so here are three halves for you.”

“But there cannot be three halves,” I remonstrated, so gravely that he burst out laughing. I felt myself turning scarlet, and resolved not to say another word. Very foolish, I daresay, I looked, as I sat there in my indignation, with eyes downcast, and hands folded on my lap; but it was impossible to be sulky with my guardian, as I found, for, taking no sort of notice of my displeasure, he resumed :

“I confess there have been a few men and women in our family since Melusina cheated the

first De Lusignan into marrying her, and among the rest a wretched fanatic, who gave up the most delightful picturesque little château in Anjou for conscience sake. A great mistake, you know, since his descendants chose to go back to the old faith which he had left. I wish they could have gone back to the château too. I saw it last year, and envied its owner, a little fat man, who trots about in sabots, and reckons up the eggs his hens lay for him every morning. Happy man! How I envied him!"

"Did you really?" I could not help saying, in some wonder.

"Of course I did. I hope you believe every word I say."

"I always do believe what people say, sir."

My guardian threw up his hands in mock despair.

"And is it so?" he cried. "Must I, who delight in paradox, ever be persecuted with matter of fact? I suppose it is a hopeless case. People will not understand each other in this world of ours. Captain Ross could never make the Esquimaux comprehend the meaning of

the word ‘tree.’ That wonderful assemblage of stately trunk and graceful bough and rich foliage, with birds singing sweet idylls beneath the leaves, was an eternal blank to them. As they were, so are we all, more or less. Not one of us can understand another man’s hobby ; yet, believe me, young lady, there is no taste, no pursuit, howsoever strange and foolish it may seem, which does not possess some wonderful charm for its special votaries, some secret delight, for ever hidden from the rest of the world, and to them both exquisite and perfect. And the upshot and moral of this tirade is, that I delight in fancy, and that literal people, without imagination, weigh me down dreadfully ; so please, Bessie, my dear, do not overpower me with your matter-of-fact ways.”

I thought my guardian both rude and sarcastic. I thought, too, and it required little discrimination to reach the conclusion, that he had a very capricious, a very uncertain—nay, let us call things by the name that belongeth unto them, a very bad temper ; but, for all that, he amused me exceedingly, and amusement goes

a great way with the young. I wished, however, he would not talk quite so much, and let Mademoiselle Aubrey, who did not look as if she were a silent person, speak. But though she sat there listening to him so quietly, and never putting in a word, I thought even then, and time showed me I was not mistaken, that she exercised a sort of control over my wayward guardian. I do not think he ever asked or followed her advice, that her wishes ruled his, or that his judgment was guided by hers, but I learned afterwards, by personal experience, as I felt then by intuition, that in her presence he never allowed his temper full play; whilst for no other reason than that she was his superior in every respect, he half disliked and half feared her. This dislike, be it understood, was rather a want of sympathy than an active feeling, and this fear led to no other result than to curb him in a little, a very little, in trifles. If it be asked why Mr. de Lusignan, not being married to this lady, kept her in his house, I can only reply that it was so, and assign no

other reason for it than the inconsistency which marked all his actions.

We had a very pleasant dinner. Pleasant in more senses than one. I was new to French cookery, and mistrustful of it upon hearsay; but its fascinations are great, and I felt them even at that early age, when appetite is all, and taste is still unformed and crude. Surely such nice-looking and nice-tasting dishes could have no mischief in them. But though a moderate epicure must needs have been satisfied with Mr. de Lusignan's *ordinaire*, and though to me it was fare both rare and sumptuous, I thought much less of it than of my guardian himself. His dinner took every unpleasant bitterness, every asperity out of him. He became genial, amusing, and delightful company. His dark eyes looked as mellow and as kind as on the day of our first meeting. His swarthy face was full of fun, and his strongly-marked, expressive features worked in the most ludicrous way imaginable, as he came out with a string of propositions, every one of which was startling, wholly untenable, but withal highly entertain-

ing. Never before had I feasted at a banquet like this. But the Mane, Thecel, Phares of Balthasar, that warning of sorrow which came to the Chaldean king in the midst of his rejoicings on the eve of the night when he was slain, and Darius the Mede succeeded to his kingdom, also comes to us all when we least expect it. We were enjoying ourselves exceedingly; at least, I was only just recovering from a fit of laughter at one of Mr. de Lusignan's stories, when the hand appeared, and wrote, as of old, "on the surface of the wall of the king's palace," words the meaning of which I for one could not decipher.

"I hope you like Burgundy," said my guardian; and after filling my glass to the brim, he raised his, and looked *con amore* at the rich ruby wine that shone through it, throwing a blood-red dye on the white table-cloth. "Burgundy rules the roast in my opinion. Claret is a cold-blooded, heartless aristocrat, who pretends to be kind to the consumptive and the dyspeptic, and who is not. A sober hypocrite—a smooth-tongued prime-minister, who will tell

you any amount of lies for power and popularity—that's Claret. But rich, genial, laughing, merry Burgundy is a gay young prince, who flings up his cap, snaps his fingers at the world, and plays out all his pranks before coming into his kingdom. I like him for his honesty, and therefore, here's a health and long life to Burgundy, say I!"

But I looked at my glass, and did not second my guardian's pledge.

"I have never had anything to do with Burgundy," I said, "and from the character you give your young prince, sir, I am afraid of him."

"Afraid of Burgundy! Fear a lamb! Burgundy is a good-natured, harmless fellow, Bessie; besides, he would surely never hurt such a pretty little thing as you are."

"Don't make the child blush," said Mademoiselle Aubrey, smiling over at me.

It was foolish in me to crimson up at my guardian's civil speech. I might have known that he spoke in jest, or, at least, that he had already drunk some glasses of Burgundy, so that the pleasant wine was urging him to say

things more kind than true. But I did blush, as Mademoiselle Aubrey saw; and feeling vexed with myself for doing so, I said hurriedly,

“I have no doubt that Burgundy is a very Phœnix amongst wines, sir ; but still——”

“A what?” interrupted Mr. de Lusignan, as if he had not caught the word.

“Don’t!” hurriedly whispered Mademoiselle Aubrey to me across the table ; but she spoke too late.

“A very Phœnix of wines,” I repeated.

I said no more. The change across Mr. de Lusignan’s countenance was so great that it struck me dumb. Life, joy, meaning itself seemed to pass away from his dark face, leaving it vacant and almost pale ; yet he put his glass down with a steady hand, and said, almost slowly—

“A Phœnix of wines, as you say. Now, what made you call it a Phoenix, Bessie ?”

I would have given anything not to answer the question, his look and manner were so altered ; but I felt as one mesmerized may feel, if half the tales we hear be true. My will was,

as it were, gone from me, and become subject to his. Being thus adjured, I must speak.

“ You praised it so much, sir,” I said, “ that I thought it must be a Phœnix.”

“ Do not—do not!” entreated Mademoiselle Aubrey. She was looking at us both. I did not know which of us two she addressed thus.

“ It is odd how that word will turn up,” said Mr. de Lusignan, taking up his glass again. “ There is Phoenix Park, in Dublin; there is even a Phoenix Insurance Company somewhere or other.”

He paused, as if seeking for some other instance. I suppose I was possessed, for I supplied it.

“ A ship, too.”

He put down his glass, spilling the wine as ne did so; and casting an imploring look on Mademoiselle Aubrey, he said, in a voice full of anguish,

“ Can’t you stop her?”

She had no need to do so. I was shocked, amazed, and frightened. Mademoiselle Aubrey rose, and taking me by the hand, led me out of

the room. Her genial face was white, her blue eyes were dim, and her lip quivered a little; still she was quite calm and self-possessed. I felt I must not question her—that I must not even utter a word of apology or regret for what had just passed. Like one in a dream, I went up with her to the drawing-room.

“Come nigh to the fire,” she said; “you look cold. You must have some tea before you go.”

I felt not cold, but stunned. It was plain that I had said something dreadful. All unwittingly I had opened the closet in which the owner of this luxurious home, Mr. de Lusignan, who ate such good dinners and talked so pleasantly about his Burgundy, kept his skeleton. The door was locked, as he thought, and he had hidden it behind silken hangings and thrown away the key, but, somehow or other, I had uttered a “sesame;” the door had flown open, and the grim tenant within, that bony guest whom my guardian longed to forget, had come forth, and sitting down amongst us, converted his little London dinner into an Egyptian banquet. I felt all the more uncomfortable that I

could not imagine how I had thus discomposed my guardian, and that there seemed to be no reason why I should not sin again unconsciously.

I had not the chance of doing so—on this evening, at least; we took our tea alone, and when tea was over, Mademoiselle Aubrey saw me home in the carriage. She spoke very little all the way, and said not a word about our meeting when we parted.

“My dear, how early you have come home,” said Mrs. Dawson, wakening from her solitary nap by the parlour fire.

I felt miserable and still somewhat bewildered, so I sat down, looked at the fire, and said not one word. Besides, I was resolved not to tell Mrs. Dawson what had taken place.

“I hope you enjoyed yourself,” she resumed.

I answered that I had not enjoyed myself at all, and if I spoke as I felt, my tone and look must have been those of an injured person.

“Dear me, was that French Mam’selle so unpleasant as all that?” exclaimed Mrs. Dawson, getting lively at the prospect of a little bit of uncharitable gossip.

"Mademoiselle Aubrey is a delightful person," I said, feeling bound to justify her.

There was a pause, then Mrs. Dawson remarked, soothingly—

"My dear, you must learn to bear with your guardian's ways—you really must."

"But I am not finding fault with Mr. de Lusignan's ways!" I cried, rather provoked.

"Then, my dear, what do you complain of?"

I felt in a dilemma, for being young, and of an open temper, I had not suspected that a secret is like the keep in a citadel, to be defended by all sorts of outworks. Having been so imprudent as to withdraw all my forces from these, I was now compelled to surrender. I did so helplessly enough.

"Mrs. Dawson, what can there be in the word *Phoenix* to upset Mr. de Lusignan? He was as pleasant as pleasant can be till that word *Phoenix* upset him."

"Well, my dear, 'tis no wonder," said Mrs. Dawson, looking grave. "Mr. de Lusignan's only son was lost at sea on board the *Phœnix*, a year ago."

“ Oh ! Mrs. Dawson !” I cried, much shocked, “ if you had only told me that, I should never have committed such a mistake.”

“ Well, my dear, no one has cared to speak about that, for, you see, your guardian and his son were not very good friends. The young man would go away somewhere or other, and his father would make him come back, and even insisted that he should return in that very ship the *Phœnix*, to which the poor young fellow, I am told, had a particular objection—and that’s all I know.”

All!—surely that was enough ! Surely that was a very dreary skeleton which my guardian kept in his closet !

CHAPTER III.

SPRING had come again. I sat alone in Mrs. Dawson's back parlour, feeling the most miserable of mortals. This year that had gone by had been my first year of sorrow. Care had knocked at my door, and I had not denied myself to this grim visitor, but let him in, perhaps to know what he was like ; and once he was within I found I could not turn him out again. He is a tedious visitor, is Care. You may sicken of his company, but he never seems to grow tired of yours. When he has exhausted one subject, he takes up another and begins anew. You are faint and very weary, but Care is fresh and strong. He came early in the morning, perhaps, and yet he holds forth unrelentingly through the hours of the day. Think yourself favoured if he lets you

go when night is coming at last, and if you can seek the cold pillow of death, and not have him by your side even then.

Care came to me now, because I no longer saw James Carr. Love for my cousin had grown with my growth. I had early clung to him for the same reason that made him cling to me, because we were of one blood. When I was still a very little girl at Mrs. Dawson's, and James but a lad at school, he would give up a boy's pleasure in the society of other boys, to come and see me whenever he could get a half day's holiday. This he did, not because he loved me, not because he cared for my childish prattle as we sat in Mrs. Dawson's garden, but because I was his little cousin, and we two were alone amongst strangers on English land. Later, he loved me for my own sake, but that cousinly affection was the beginning, and so it was with me also. I looked up to James Carr as the only one of my kindred whom I knew, the only tie of flesh and blood that I could claim and call mine own. My dead father seemed to look at me again from his blue eyes, and there

were echoes of my father's voice in that of my young cousin. I felt a sense of property in him. As he grew into manhood I got proud of his six feet two, of his manly presence, of his handsome face, of his honest look. I knew in my inmost heart that he was not a man of striking abilities ; that, spite his Irish blood, the fair gift of fluent and pleasant speech had not been granted to him ; but I would have endured any amount of torture rather than confess as much to mortal creature, and such as he was .I would have scorned the most fascinating young prince that was ever seen out of the fairy-tales, for his dear sake.

Loving my cousin as I did with all the fervour and the sincerity of youth, though without much of its romance, it was hard not to see him, so hard that I again got quite angry with my guardian about it. My wrath was nursed up and kept warm by the fact that neither he nor his sister-in-law came near me after the unlucky day on which my use of the word Phœnix had led to a scene. Yet Mademoiselle Aubrey had not forgotten me, and, like a good though invisi-

ble fairy, she showed her remembrance by her gifts. A week after my visit to Portland Place, an able drawing-master called to give me my first lesson.

There is nothing so delightful as a new toy, be the child old or young. I was in raptures with mine; drawing became my mania, and well-nigh superseded music. Beethoven succumbed before Antinous, and no Sonata could vie with the misty charm of water-colours. Indeed, I am not sure that this new love would not have enabled me to bear, with tolerable equanimity, the absence of dear James Carr, if the greatest trouble of all had not come to me with the first days of Spring, with violets, primroses, and April showers; for then it was that Uncle John died. When earth was adorning herself once more in all her young beauty, when the tide of life was at its fullest, and every created thing was glad of its being, Uncle John, who had long been very weary, sat down one evening to take his last rest, and bade us go on without him. We went, for there is no standing still, no lingering even on that journey; but, oh! how

often I looked back! how my heart ached as I looked! and what a great wide blank the world now seemed to me! Mrs. Dawson was still a good-natured woman, though her brother was gone, but she was also a very dull one, and life, mind, fancy, and imagination had forsaken the house in Kensington, and left it cold and bare indeed. This culminating sorrow it was that made me feel so miserable on this May morning, that made my pencil flag, and took all beauty from the head of the Pythian Apollo I was attempting to copy. The Pythian Apollo! I remembered how Uncle John had talked of him once, and the recollection smote me with the unconscious pathos which lies in our thoughts of the dead. My heart was full, so very full that my paper was soon blotted with tears, and recklessly throwing my arms across it, I laid my head down and cried bitterly.

A carriage at the door, a loud double knock, and a "Please, miss, you're wanted," roused me in a second. I believe grief makes one stupid, for it seemed as if I had no alternative but to obey, and enter the front parlour at once. Per-

haps I had a vague hope that it might be James Carr ; but of course it was not, and of course it was my guardian.

“ Well, Bessie, how are you ? ” he began ; then he stopped short, and stared at me. “ Good gracious ! ” he exclaimed, after a pause, “ what is the matter ? —what does ail you, child ? ”

“ Uncle John, Mrs. Dawson’s brother, is dead,” I replied. I could say no more.

Mr. de Lusignan seemed relieved at the intelligence.

“ Well, my dear, people must die,” he said, a little impatiently. “ You don’t mean to live for ever, do you ? ”

“ No, sir,” I replied, feeling red and indignant.

“ Quite right. Never be eccentric. Society thinks it impertinence ; and immortality would assuredly be the greatest piece of eccentricity you or any one else could be guilty of. Well, I am sorry for your trouble ; but I bring news that will cheer you. Mademoiselle Aubrey and I are going to Paris after to-morrow, and you are to come with us.”

He expected me to be overjoyed. I was not.

Every note in music is sweet, but the note which comes in at the wrong place produces discord. News that would have enchanted me when Uncle John was living, jarred on every fibre of my heart because he was dead. It sounded like treason to leave the land that kept his grave—that poor green grave in which, it seemed to me, he must lie so cold and so forlorn if I went away. So Mr. de Lusignan's proposal touched me not, and I stood cold and mute before him as I heard it.

"I am very sorry this thing does not please you, Bessie," he said, drily, "because, you see, it must be."

"Are we to be long away, sir?" I asked, still ungracious.

"Three years," he coldly answered.

I stared at him in blank dismay.

"And am I not to see James Carr for three years?" I cried.

My guardian looked much bored.

"My dear, can't you really do without that very tall and red-haired young man for three years?" he asked, remonstratively.

I do not know which exasperated me most, the question or the comment on the colour of James Carr's hair; but I know that I answered warmly:

"No, sir, I cannot do three years without knowing how my cousin—my only relation—the only being who cares for me"—this was a hit at Mr. de Lusignan—"is getting on; indeed I cannot."

"My dear, he is getting on charmingly. I saw him yesterday, and I do believe he has grown since I saw him a year ago. You are worn and thin, but he has thriven upon absence and separation. So be a good girl, and fret no more; for he is filling out *à vue d'œil*, as the French say."

I was stung and mortified, and bursting into tears, I said very rudely—

"I—I don't believe it;" but I did, every word of it.

Mr. de Lusignan stared again, but shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"My dear child," he remarked composedly, "you shall have the chance that was given to

Thomas of Didymus, for your cousin is to dine with Mrs. Dawson and you to-morrow evening. Only, remember, after to-morrow we go to Paris."

The unexpected concession took me by surprise, and before I could stammer a few foolish words, Mr. de Lusignan had left me, and I was alone.

This interview revealed to me a most unpleasant fact, a fact, too, of which I had entertained no suspicion, so smooth and even had been my life till then—I had a temper. I felt ashamed and vexed, and thought it was that shame and vexation which made me sit down and cry when the street door closed on my guardian; but it was not, and when these troubled waters grew still, and I could see down through their depths, I knew well enough what ailed me. The thought that James Carr had taken our separation so easily, ay, and thriven upon it, as Mr. de Lusignan averred, was too much for me. Whilst I had been foolishly longing for the look of his eye, and the sound of his voice, James Carr had been devoting himself to agriculture, taking

care of his little red-haired step-sisters, doing all sorts of good things, but certainly not fretting for me. The pride of eighteen Summers rose in arms at the thought. I dried my tears; I went up to my room, began my packing forthwith, and nursed dire plans for revenge the while. James Carr was coming to-morrow, was he? Well, then, I would be cool to James Carr. I would show no regret at parting from him, and I would show great, not to say ecstatic, delight at the prospect of visiting Paris. Still I would be condescending and kind. I would promise to write now and then, *when I had time*; and I would show my magnanimity and my indifference—feelings that are nearer of kin than the world suspects—by talking freely to James Carr of those three little red-haired Molochs, whom I knew he set above me; and even of that odious Dick Smith, whose praises he was ever singing in my wearied ears in the days when we used to meet. To these stern resolves I determined to adhere; and if I did not, it was all owing to Mrs. Dawson.

My going away was a cruel blow to the poor lady.

"What shall I do without you?" she cried, clasping her helpless hands. "And then it will make such a difference at the end of the year!"

And what between the loss of my society and the difference to her income, Mrs. Dawson sat down and cried. I could not help crying for company. Surely never was journey to the gayest of cities watered by so many tears.

"And then your cousin coming to dine to-morrow!" she resumed, incoherently. "Bessie, what shall I do?"

"Oh! don't let that be a trouble, dear Mrs. Dawson," I said, eagerly. "You may give him anything to eat. James is not at all hard to please. Anything will do, provided there is enough of it," I added, as a vivid remembrance of a boyish James and a cold leg of mutton flashed across my mind.

"My dear, that is not it, but Mr. Carr is really so—so stern, and poor dear John's loss has made me feel so low."

James stern! James, whom I had not seen for a twelvemonth, from whom I was going to

be separated for three years, an object of terror to Mrs. Dawson ! In a moment I veered round to him, and all my little resentful schemes for his annoyance were swept away from my mind.

What a fever of expectation I was in for the whole of the next day ! The moment I heard his knock at the door I ran out of the parlour, in my eager joy, and opened to him, without waiting till Mary should come up from the kitchen. Yet even in that first moment, when he stood on the threshold, his stately figure darkening the sunlit street behind him, I saw, with a shock of unpleasant surprise, that the sign of the lion was in the ascendant. A second look also told me that James was in robust health, a florid, handsome, tall, and broad-shouldered young fellow, to whom fretting was unknown. My little plans for revenge came back, but I had no time to indulge in them. Though I had adorned myself, and tried to look my best, it availed me not—James caught my hand, and looked down anxiously in my face.

“ Bessie, have you been ill ? ” he asked, uneasily.

“No, not ill, James ; but—but I have not been quite well, either.”

We entered the parlour together. James, dear old fellow, was no great reader, but he had always been pleased that I should read, and grow learned, as he termed it. There was no littleness in James Carr’s mind. The only fault he had to find with books was that they would get out of book-cases, and make a confusion—“a mess,” said James, “on tables.” I knew this, also, that straightness in all things was dear to James ; so my first act, on entering the parlour, was to put back in its place a flower-stand which I had partly removed from the window, in order to watch for his coming.

“What is that for, Bessie ?” he inquired, a little sharply.

“Why do you ask ?” I said tartly, for I would not tell him my true reason.

James tightened his lips, and knit his brows. In some trepidation, I inquired after his sisters. James thanked me drily—his sisters were very well.

“And how is Mr. Smith ?” I asked, bent on

conciliation. "Has he married his cousin yet?"

"His cousin ran away with her music-master a month ago," replied James, and he began to whistle softly.

Sailors have an objection to whistling. It brings on foul weather, they say. I knew of old that, when James whistled, some storm or other was coming on. He had sat down in Uncle John's old crimson chair, and he stared at the flower-stand in the window without minding me. I stood before him much perplexed. I knew not yet how to read the story of his straight brows and set features.

"And how does Mr. Smith take this?" I asked at random.

"He drowned himself last Tuesday fortnight," answered James, grimly.

Verily this was drifting from Charybdis into Scylla. I felt very much shocked. I had seen that Mr. Smith once. A great, uncouth fellow he was, and James had brought him to me as he had brought me his sisters—as he had brought me his white mice when he was a boy—as he would have brought me a bear, had he

but had one. I knew not what to say, for James was whistling again. Luckily, Mrs. Dawson, who was under strict orders not to leave us alone, now entered the room in a flutter. I took care not to say anything about Mr. Smith, but let her and James manage the conversation as they pleased, till we sat down to dinner.

Mrs. Dawson had done her best, and the dinner was a good one. James brought to it that best of all sauces, the Lacedemonian. I was pleased to see him display such a hearty appetite. Uncle John had always spoken of Homer's heroes as being vigorous eaters, and I liked to find this analogy at least between my young Celt and these old Greeks. I have already said that James was not what is called a good talker; but people who care for each other also take pleasure in each other's discourse, and when James told me all he was planning and doing in Yorkshire, I found him quite eloquent.

"I have had the bricklayers," he said, pausing in the act of helping me to some fowl.

"Have you? What for, James?"

"The last gale of wind knocked down all the chimney-stacks—did not leave one standing."

"How provoking! And bricklayers' wages are so high, are they not?"

James looked straight at me.

"How do you want a man with a wife and seven children to live if he does not get what you call high wages?" he asked.

I felt snubbed, but I was used to it, and did not answer.

"I have had the gardener too," resumed James—"a good deal more expensive than poor wretched bricklayers, Bessie."

I really thought this second snubbing superfluous; but Mrs. Dawson was present, and I would not rebel. I asked humbly enough what the gardener had been doing for James.

"For the garden, you mean?" Another snubbing. "Why, not much. I shall go in for roses chiefly. You like roses?"

This mollified me at once; besides, this homely discourse of James had its charm. When you are to live in a house, you take an interest in

the repairing of its chimney stacks; when a garden is to be yours, it is pleasant to hear that it is to be full of roses. I believe I looked kindly at James across the table; for though he sat with his back to the light, I saw a rapid flush of pleasure pass across his handsome face. He had none of the poetry of the Irish race, but he had all its sensitiveness. Unluckily he was touchy, too, and sadly quick to take offence. Just then, however, he was softened, as I was soothed. These roses that were going to blow in his garden, and fill it with fragrance, were roses of good-will to us both.

Mrs. Dawson marred all. She was a sleepy sort of woman. She lived in a dream, and got the echoes rather than the sounds of the outward world. This gave her a trick of answering speeches that had been made ten minutes, and now, remembering that her two servants had struck for higher salaries, she said, most inopportunely,

“Wages are high; but what can one expect, Mr. Carr, from such a government as that we have got?”

It was Mrs. Dawson's habit when she was put out—and my going away put her out sadly—to sit on the opposition benches, and abuse Government. She was one of the tribe who must blame some one for their troubles; and, being too good-natured to lay the burden on the shoulders of her neighbour, she took those of Government, whom she looked upon, I believe, as a sturdy broad-backed old sinner. Mr. Carr stared on being thus addressed. He was, as I have said, a great disciplinarian. I doubt if he had any political opinions; but Government, Whig or Tory, he revered. He scorned to argue with Mrs. Dawson, for though he was not a man of brilliant parts himself, he knew well enough a weak mind from a strong one; but he gave me a keen, searching look. I saw very well that he thought me a rebel at heart; and, worse still, a suggester of rebellious sentiments in others. He had got one of his strange crotchets in his head, and for once I was quite angry with him. All the roses that ever blew could do us no good now.

A fine chill drizzling rain fell down as night

set in. Mrs. Dawson had a fire in the front parlour. I played and sang some of the old Irish melodies for James, who had asked me. The music softened me a little—besides, were we not to part on the morrow for three years? When I came back to the fireside, there were tears in my eyes. James did not see them—he was looking moodily at the fire; whilst Mrs. Dawson valiantly struggled against sleep in her chair. But sleep, calling in the heat of the fire to his aid, soon had the best of the battle. Her eyelids quivered, then closed; her head sank on her breast, then fell gently back; then came a snore, to tell us that sleep had prevailed, and which sounded like that flourish of trumpets with which the conqueror proclaims his victory in the old dramas.

James was still looking at the fire. What was he thinking of? The contraction of his straight brows, and the twitchings of his mobile lips, told me that his thoughts were not pleasant, but told me no more. On hearing Mrs. Dawson's snore, he looked up, and staring hard at me he said,

“I hate Frenchmen!”

“Do you?” I said, not knowing what else to say.

“I saw one flogging his horse at Boulogne. I should have liked to have the flogging of him.”

James looked terribly in earnest. I had always been afraid of him. I felt that old fear which had slept during the year of our separation creeping round my very heart again. I coughed gently, hoping to waken Mrs. Dawson; but I did not; and the worst was that James detected me, and was down upon me in a moment.

“Are we too much alone for your liking, Bessie?” he asked, with such grim suspicion in his blue eyes that I could only colour up and look as I felt—conscious and guilty. “You are glad to go—I know you are,” he said, working himself up to an unreasonable wrath, which waxed all the hotter that he had to speak low, for fear of wakening Mrs. Dawson.

“I have no voice in the matter, as you know,

James ; and, surely, *you* would not have me rebel against my guardian ? ”

“ I don’t tell you to rebel. I only say you are glad to go.”

I scorned to deny. James whistled a little while.

“ Shall I tell you why I hate Frenchmen ? ” he said, suddenly leaving off his whistling in order to look hard at me ; “ why, because I know they will all be running after you.”

His manner had made me nervous, and I did not know now whether to laugh or cry at this vision of the manhood of France pursuing my poor little unlucky self. I thought it best to laugh.

“ Thank you, James,” I said.

“ Don’t laugh, Bessie, this is no laughing matter. Dick Smith went and drowned himself, but he followed his cousin and her music-master first, and perhaps it is well that he did not overtake them.”

Again James knit his brows, and again his lips twitched nervously.

"James, what ails you?" I asked, under my breath—"what can ail you?"

"Yes," he answered, "I never knew it till Dick drowned himself because that girl jilted him; but I know it now—I know it now," he added, looking at me with eyes in which the tenderness of his old love, and the fierceness of this new feeling, blended strangely.

I felt myself turning sick with fear. All this was very new, very terrible to me. A West Indian tornado suddenly bursting over our tranquil land could scarcely have terrified me more than to see matter-of-fact James Carr turned into a wrathful Othello.

"James," I said, laying my hand on his arm, and speaking soothingly, "surely you know me?"

He did not heed me.

"It has not got out of my head since Dick drowned himself," he said, in that grim, low voice which terrified me so. "How long do you think I have been in London, Bessie?—ten days. And what have I been doing?—walk-

ing up and down this terrace. Who lives in the house opposite this, Bessie ?”

“ Oh ! James, don’t be ridiculous. They are all old maids.”

“ Yes ; but there is a fellow who goes there, and who stares at these windows. I have seen him, Bessie, so you can’t deny it.”

“ James !”

“ And there’s the flower-stand. Why are you always changing it from one side of the window to the other ? Is it a signal ? Does it mean ‘ I am going out to-day,’ or, ‘ The coast is clear,’ or, ‘ We’ll have better luck to-morrow ?’ Why did you run to that flower-stand the moment I came in ?”

An older woman than I was would have told James that he was mad, or that he insulted her. I said nothing, but stared very pitifully at him, no doubt, for in a moment he looked another man, and snatching my hand, he cried :

“ Oh ! Bessie, my darling, don’t mind me—don’t ! I am a beast—I am ! But you don’t know what I have gone through since Dick Smith drowned himself.”

It would have been a good thing for us both if I could have given James a good scolding just then. He would have taken it as meekly as he took little Polly's kicks and cuffs, and all might have been right once more; but he had spoken loud, and Mrs. Dawson woke up with a start.

"The flower-stand," she said, winking at us to show that she was wide awake. "Yes, Bes-sie will change it about so. It injures the flowers, Mr. Carr."

I should have liked to shake Mrs. Dawson, I felt so angry. Why had she gone to sleep at the wrong time, and wakened up at the wrong time; and why was she so very stupid? Mr. Carr gave me an odd look; but what could I say? Soon after this he said it was late, and he rose to go. We parted kindly enough. The three years that were to divide us softened away every bitterness. Dear James Carr! When I went with him to the door, and we both stood there on the threshold, hand in hand, looking out into the chill, misty night, I fancy we both felt all the old tenderness of our childhood and our youth welling back into our hearts.

"Well, I *must* go," he said with a sigh. He stooped and kissed me twice; then he hurried away, and I stood listening to his quick, firm step as he went down the terrace, feeling all forlorn. Mrs. Dawson, who had considerately remained in the parlour, said with a pitiful sigh, as I re-entered it,

"And so you are going away to-morrow, Bessie? But why do you change that flower-stand so? I really think it injures the flowers."

A great guilty throb of joy shot through my heart as I heard her. Yes, I was going away to-morrow, and James Carr, who, poor fellow! was now prowling outside, as he wrote to me later, having come back in the darkness to watch for my shadow on the window-blind—James Carr could not follow me. I was going for three yeats, far from those terrible looks which had made me sick with fear—far from that fierce, jealous love which had suddenly become so awful a bondage.

But scarcely had these thoughts passed through me when I drew back from them like one scared. Like a coward, too, I denied them.

I was not glad to go—I was not afraid of Jan Carr, and boldly I declared to my heart, “Y have said that which is not true.”

CHAPTER IV.

IT is not in youth that we feel the bitterness of separation. Later we know that to part often means to meet never again in this world ; and knowing this, we cannot leave the friend we love, the land we live in, the dwelling even that has sheltered us, without a keen pang of regret. But in youth we know nothing of all this. With eager hand we turn the pages of the great book of life, unconscious that we are rarely allowed to read the same page a second time. And so youth is often thought heartless when it is only hopeful.

When I bade Mrs. Dawson adieu the next morning, I was very sorry, but with the light sorrow of a young girl before whom lies a bright pleasure-journey. Little did I think

that the first chapter in the story of my life was closed, to be re-opened no more—that never again should I see that kind face, never again enter that friendly dwelling.

“I shall only be three years away,” I said to her, trying to be cheerful; “and when we come back, you know, I am to come and see you once a week, *at least*.”

Yes, we had made that compact; for Mrs. Dawson was still as young as myself in some things. Once a week, indeed! Alas! before six months were over Mrs. Dawson had gone and joined her only remaining brother in Australia; and thus she and Uncle John vanished from my life—one in the grave, the other in a distant country, and the little home which had once bound us was broken, and its household gods scattered far and wide. But I was to be “only three years away,” as I had told Mrs. Dawson, and I did not even dream of the things which were to come to pass before six months were over.

When I reached the house in Portland Place, that Aladdin’s palace, as I had always called it

to myself, it looked as stripped and bare as if the African Enchanter had uttered some evil spell upon it. The costly furniture was gone, the stately rooms were empty, dust lay on the uncarpeted floors, and if I had seen a spider weaving its web in the gilded cornices, I should not have wondered much. I only caught a glimpse of this desecrated dwelling. My guardian and Mademoiselle Aubrey were ready ; a woman was waiting to receive the keys. There was nothing to do but to go away. We drove off to the station at once ; the train was ready to start ; we flew, as it seemed to me, through a green landscape dotted with towns and villages ; then came the sea, with its blue billows toying in the sunlight for ever and ever away ; and after a calm passage there was more railway rushing through a darkening land, till the lights and subdued roar of a city were around us. We were in Paris.

I suppose there cannot be many sensations in life more delightful than that of wakening in Paris for the first time at the age of eighteen. But when the morning is a bright Spring morn-

ing, when your room is one of the most comfortable in the Hôtel Meyerbeer, and you need only look out of your window to get a radiant glimpse of the Champs Elysées, with trees, flowers, and flashing fountains dancing in the sun, delight becomes rapture.

Uncle John had spent some years of his youth in this syren of modern cities, and he had told me a good deal about her, especially as beheld through the dim splendour of the past. My young head had got full of some odd fancies, in which chronology was little regarded, and topography ignored. I gathered in a cluster the Bastille and Notre Dame, the Seine and the Boulevards. Of Anne of Austria, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Marie Antoinette, Henri Quatre, Napoleon, and Robespierre, I made a group, and the figures flitted through my brain stately, sorrowful, tragic, or gay, but quite as real to me as the living men and women in the street below. I thought Mademoiselle Aubrey would never be up and dressed this morning; and when I at length entered her room, I was in a fever of excitement.

“Oh! Mademoiselle,” I cried, breathlessly, “do you know where we go to-day? Shall we see the Bastille, or the Tuileries, or Cours la Reine?”

“My goodness!” she interrupted. “What is the matter, my dear child? The Bastille! Why, that has been pulled down ages. The Tuileries are no great distance” (Alas! there were Tuileries then!), “and Cours la Reine is close by. But what can you want with that dullest of dull walks?”

“Uncle John told me that Anne of Austria used to go there.”

“Uncle John! Have you got an uncle?”

“Oh! no, but——” Here I broke down, as the calm, tender face of the dead, that dear face which slept for ever beneath the green sod, came back to me, with its thoughtful look and its faded smile.

It was one of Mademoiselle Aubrey’s gifts that she had kept, spite the sad wisdom which comes with years, all the quick sensitiveness of youth. In a moment her eyes were dim, and her lip quivered.

"My dear, I am sorry, very sorry," she said, kindly laying her hand upon my arm. "We two shall go wherever you like," she added; "but you must let Mr. de Lusignan have his way first."

Mr. de Lusignan's way and mine happened to be divergent paths. Mr. de Lusignan was no longer at the time of life when the past is lovely as a fairy-tale. Mr. de Lusignan did not care a rush for Henri Quatre, and yawned over Mademoiselle de la Vallière; besides, Mr. de Lusignan was a man of the world, who half hated, half laughed at history. He spared not the living actors, and held in scant pity or esteem the sorrowful and illustrious dead, who once had trod that tragic stage. They bored him excessively, I believe, and no doubt I bored him too, with my ardour and enthusiasm, and insatiable curiosity, for he railed at me unmercifully, and whenever I wanted to poke my nose into some odd, out-of-the-way historical corner, he invariably said, "Let us go to the Palais Royal."

Alas for the weakness of the flesh! I could never resist that bait. Oh! most fascinating of

palaces ! rare combination of shops and royalty, who that has lingered in your galleries at night, when you glittered with the light of a thousand gas-stars, can forget you, and not lament your fate ? Infinite variety was your charm, perpetual gaiety and good-humour your characteristic. I never entered you without a throb of joy at my heart. I never left you without a sigh of regret. And though my guardian had neither throb nor sigh to give you, he liked you well. He was a man of to-day ; he liked the cafés, the living crowd, the unflagging gaiety of Paris, just as he hated gloom, sorrow, and funerals.

Thanks to Mademoiselle Aubrey, I saw something besides the Palais Royal. I had taken pains to get into her favour. Years and experience had taught her a certain coldness ; I saw it, but I was bent on winning her liking, and this is an attempt in which the young rarely fail. Mademoiselle Aubrey, though wise, had three weak points—her chocolate in the morning, her footstool in the afternoon, and her book in the evening. By attending to these, I won her

heart, as I learned when she dropped the formal Miss Carr one morning, and gaily called me "Mignonne." Mr. de Lusignan took up the name, and I ceased to be Bessie Carr for either of them from that day forth. I believe that he too liked me, in his capricious way; but it was a trying way at the best.

We had been three weeks in Paris, when my guardian suddenly said to us, one morning—

"I think we shall go to Fontainebleau now."

This was at breakfast. Mademoiselle Aubrey put down her cup, and looked at him very earnestly.

"To Fontainebleau!" she repeated.

"Yes," he carelessly answered, "we have exhausted Paris. We shall spend the Summer there."

Exhausted Paris!—but that was his way. He neither consulted us, nor asked how we liked the plan. In this, as in all else, his pleasure was his law. Well, Paris was enchanting, but Fontainebleau was attractive too. Uncle John had told me about it. Was there not a palace there?—a palace and a forest, the

basis of every fairy tale, and, though I was eighteen, it was not so very long ago since the fairy tales and I had been fast friends.

Mr. de Lusignan's fancies never admitted of delay, so we got ready at once, and left Paris in the afternoon of the following day.

When we got down at the station, the setting sun was firing a vast horizon of wooded hills. I saw the forest in that burning glow, with its waves of golden green climbing up rocks, and meeting the blue sky.

A carriage soon took us to Fontainebleau. I liked the look of the place, with its long, clean streets, low, white houses, and large gardens, full of tall trees that nodded at us over high walls; and when the carriage reached the large furnished house which Mr. de Lusignan had secured in Paris, by that talisman, a well-filled purse, I uttered a cry of delight on seeing the old gateway which opened to let us in, for it was grey with stone, red with brick, and it wore a heavy coronal of bright young green creepers drooping above its ancient head.

"And do we really live here?" I cried, "and

is that beautiful old gate ours? I must draw it—I really must. Penn's gray and vermillion, and a little burnt Sienna."

"Do not fall in love with the gate, Mignonne," interrupted my guardian. "You know I forbid the banns until you are twenty-one."

"Is this not the gate of Gabrielle D'Estrées?" asked Mademoiselle Aubrey, as we alighted at the *perron*.

"The very same," he answered. "Of course Miss Carr's historical studies have made her familiar with the name of that lady."

He was mystifying me, but I was so surprised to find that both he and Mademoiselle Aubrey knew this place familiarly, that I asked, absent- ly, who this Madame Gabrielle had been.

"Oh! no great things. See to that luggage, Louis." Mr. de Lusignan had a courier, who was a wonderful man; silent, but marvellously efficient—a sort of genie I thought him. "There are plenty more similar memorials of such illustrious French ladies about here," he re- sumed, addressing me as we now stood in the hall. "We have got the Avenues la Vallière,

Montespan, and Maintenon. This very stately, these cool and shady. Is there not, too, the Route de Pompadour?"

"I have heard about Madame de Maintenon and the carps," I said, rather eagerly; "and how, as she fed them, she compared her lot with theirs, and said they too would like to go back again to their mud! And some of those carps are alive still, but quite old and hoary; and they wear gold rings or collars, I can't remember which."

"Can't you?—happy child not to know that the oldest carps could not remember the first Napoleon, and were born long after he bade his guard adieu from the head of the grand *escalier d'honneur*. Ah! what would I not give to believe in carps, and gold rings, and the rest of it."

"But the carps are old, and they do wear gold collars," I persisted, reluctant to give up my story. "I have read it in a book."

"And it is time to dress for dinner," said Mr. de Lusignan, looking at his watch.

A bright-eyed, pert-looking servant girl, who had been hired with the house, I suppose,

showed us up to our rooms. Mademoiselle Aubrey, who was the neatest and tidiest of old maids, at once began unpacking ; but I was a young maid yet, so, giving a look at my room, which was comfortable and commonplace, and leaving my crushed dresses to their fate, I flew to the window. A flagged terrace, with formal stone vases full of scarlet geraniums, and a sweep of gravel path, shaded by the trees of the grounds, which, to my inexperienced eyes, looked extensive, and the old gate, beneath which that gay Henri Quatre had bowed the white plume of his helmet as he rode in to see his fair Gabrielle—I have learned her story since then—were my prospect. I thought it enchanting. Was I not in Fontainebleau, one of the world's wonders ?—and was I not going to transfer that charming old gate to the still virgin page of my sketch-book, and to see a historical palace, and to wander in a pre-historical forest ?

What youth did for me, his dinner did for Mr. de Lusignan. It was a good dinner, and by the time he had despatched his little French

dishes, and his bottle of Burgundy, my guardian became quite genial. His brown eye got mellow, he leaned back in his chair, and laughed at me and my enthusiasm as he sipped his wine.

“Well, but you, too, like Fontainebleau?” I retorted.

“How do you know that I do, Mignonne?”

“Well, you have been here before; and if—”

“How do you know that I have been here before?—who told you so?” he asked, with a sudden change of look and tone that half frightened me. “Ah! to be sure,” he added, recovering quickly—“I let it out myself. Yes, as you say, I have been here before; and I shall have the honour”—he was quite rude and sarcastic now—“to be Miss Carr’s guide over the palace to-morrow.”

If anything could have damped my ardour, my guardian’s uncertain temper would have done so. But unpleasant impressions do not last at eighteen. The word palace evoked some delightful visions, on which I went to

sleep that night, and which the morrow amply fulfilled.

Oh ! what a grand old song is that of Time ! —awful, sublime, and lamentable by turns, and never-ceasing. How it goes on throughout ages, now triumphant as a jubilee, now plaintive as a tale of wrong, but still endless ! Is there not something magnificent, and yet wearisome, like the perpetual moaning of the sea, in those full tones which rise from the earth, proclaiming the beauty and the glory of creation, and telling ever, and again and again, man's strange and eventful story to his God ? From green and ancient forests, from ruins basking in the sunshine, from cities and palaces it comes, evermore calling itself legend, tradition, or history, and lulling the ear of generations with its monotonous chant.

But that song has not lost its freshness when we are young, for then the whole world is still as a splendid show ; and a rare old place did Fontainebleau seem to me. I was half wild with admiration and delight as we crossed the wide courtyards, and went through the stately

rooms, and over the beautiful gardens of that rendezvous of palaces, as it has been called. For Fontainebleau is like the oak in its own forest. It was first an acorn, then a sapling, then a mighty tree, no longer reckoning time by years, but by centuries. When it was a hunting-lodge, Saint Thomas à Becket consecrated its little chapel in which, seven hundred years later, the captive Pius the Seventh said mass. Here kings died, and other kings were born, and royal heirs received their foreign brides, and men and women of tragic fame left many a token behind them. We were shown the armour in which Monaldeschi was murdered, at the behest of that stern Christina of Sweden, who could give up a kingdom, but could not relinquish her revenge; the bed in which Marie Antoinette had slept, and the delicate ironwork which Louis XVI. forged for the window of her bedroom.

“These graceful leaves do not tell us of Fate, do they, Mignonne!” asked Mr. de Lusignan. “We shall come to something more significant presently.”

And so we did ; for when we were shown the little mahogany table on which Napoleon signed his abdication, Mr. de Lusignan pointed out to me the half-effaced stab of the penknife which the conquered conqueror of Europe gave the harmless wood in his wrath.

“ We will leave the carps and the gardens for another day,” said my guardian, looking at his watch. “ This morning we will have a drive in the forest.”

I had had a glimpse of Welsh mountains as a little child, and I remembered wandering by the sea-shore, and hearing the great sounding waves dash over rocks, and come beating up the beach, but I had never been in a forest before this day. For the first time I saw mighty oaks and beeches, over whose green heads ages had passed, leaving them verdant still ; for the first time I went along those avenues across which streaks of sunshine played, and which stretched miles away, till they closed in a vista of golden light ; and for the first time, too, the solemn gloom of those vast boughs, beneath whose shadow grew another forest of cool green ferns,

tall, stately, and motionless, sheltered there alike from storm or sunshine, became revealed to me.

I was nearly beside myself with delight. Mr. de Lusignan leaned back in the carriage, folded his arms, and looked at me keenly from beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

“Enjoy yourself, Mignonne,” he said, kindly. “Look at that tree,” he added, as we reached an open space, in the centre of which rose a stately gnarled oak, which a recent thunder-storm had blasted, “that is the Charlemagne; no, I mistake, the Pharamond.”

“Have all these trees names?” I asked.

“To be sure they have. The whole forest belongs, not to the Crown, as you might imagine, but to an old soldier, who came here to live on a small competence, and to take that rest which we all long for, seldom reach, and more seldom enjoy. This retired serjeant was a man of impassioned mind and ardent heart. These mighty trees, growing in forest rows, or scattered among rocks, woke in him the love of a lover, and the raptures of a poet. He took possession

of them. This oak he called Pharamond, that beech he named Alexandre Dumas; and so, toying with literature and history, he peopled this ancient forest with the dead and the living, and made it his own. And this was not enough for him. That the whole world might see and worship the beauty of his darlings, he made paths amongst the rocks—heaven knows at what toil and cost!—and he wandered up and down the forest, followed by a man with a brush, and a pot of blue paint, who left significant blue arrows behind him, arrows which, like Ariadne's clue, lead you along this vast labyrinth, and make it hard to go astray. Happy man! Think what a life his has been! To discover a grotto, or dig out a new rock—to call this tree La Reine Blanche, or this mighty mass of stone the Eagle's Eyrie! And then the zeal of the man. If it were not that I so detest tourists, we should have joined his caravan, Mignonne, for he has one every week. He goes about with a band of strangers, whom he has never seen, and may never see again, and explores with them the forest or the rocks, as the

case may be; and when the time allotted for the excursion is over, he blows a blast on his horn, like Roland at Roncevaux, and calls them all in to return to Fontainebleau in the gloaming, for all of which he does not receive one farthing. Now just tell me, Mignonne, if Monsieur Denecourt is not a man to be envied?"

Many are the dreams of bliss which haunt the heart of eighteen; but I doubt if to give time, labour, and money to rocks and trees be one. I suppose I stared and looked perplexed, for Mr. de Lusignan, who was in one of his talkative moods, enlightened me as to his exact meaning.

" You see, Mignonne," he said, " I consider the having of a hobby supreme bliss. There is nothing like it in life. Still, as there is a choice in steeds, I like your pure thoroughbred a great deal better than your worn-out hack. So I envy Monsieur Denecourt, and after him yonder landscape-painter."

We were leaving the shade of the forest, and our road now passed through savage rocks, amongst which grew oaks and beeches of huge

size and stately beauty. Ferns and moss abounded here; and surely, though none were visible, many wild things must have made their lair in this solitude. A young painter sat at his easel by the roadside, the only living creature besides ourselves. He was painting an old oak, with a hollow trunk and broad green boughs. He smoked a cigar as he painted, and looked the happiest of men, with a big black dog lying on the ground by his side.

"Now, there's a life for you!" said my guardian, as we drove on and left the painter behind us. "He goes off in the morning with his traps on his back, and he spends the day in beautiful places; and when he goes home at night, and sleeps the sound sleep of youth, why, he dreams of fame, and he is a Claude, or a Poussin, or a Gainsborough, or a Turner, as his proclivities may be. Ah! if it were not for Winter, a landscape-painter would be the happiest of men. And here's another of their tribe; and there's another feature of the happiness of the race."

I heard a jingling of bells, and looking round

I saw a little donkey-cart coming towards us. In it sat a grey-bearded man, in a slouched hat and a loose velveteen jacket, and by his side a little maiden with golden curls, who wore a scarlet cloak and hood. It was she who held the reins; she laughed as she shook them with a great jingling of the bells, and the little donkey, who looked a spirited donkey, put himself on his mettle, and began galloping at a great speed, and had soon passed us. I do not know which of the two looked in greater glee—the grey-bearded man or the child.

“Now, there it is,” said Mr. de Lusignan, with a sigh of mock envy. “That man, because he is a painter, can scout civilization and its bonds. He can wear a velveteen jacket, and ride in a donkey-cart. Well, where are we now?”

“This is the *dormoir* of Lantara,” answered Mademoiselle Aubrey.

The spot was a beautiful spot. A little flat bit of table-land, with grand old trees casting their broad shadow upon it, and around it a wilderness of rock and fern. A road went hard by, and there was a signboard too, yet the

place looked as wild and lonely a place as you need wish to see. We alighted, and Mademoiselle Aubrey at once went to a low flat rock, and sat down upon it.

"This is the *dormoir* of Lantara," she said again.

"That's the other side of the picture," said my guardian. "This Lantara was a cowherd, who used to mind his cows here a hundred years ago or so. How from a cowherd he became a famous landscape-painter is more than I can tell you; but famous he was in his day, though he died in an hospital. Granted that he paid dear for such genius and fame as he had, I daresay he would have thought them worth the cost. It is something to lie on that stone, Mignonne, and see the misty breath of the morning fade away from a scene like this, or to watch the slanting rays of the setting sun passing through the foliage of these grand old trees, and to feel within oneself the power of putting it all on canvas. And now, Mignonne, you may go back to Mademoiselle Aubrey if you like, for I am going to smoke a cigar."

I turned back, and found Mademoiselle Aubrey still sitting as we had left her. Her head was bent, her hands were clasped, and she was moaning, “Oh! my darling! my darling!” in tones so full of sorrow that I stood still before her, and looked at her in great dismay. She raised her tear-stained face, and said in a broken voice,

“Do not mind it, Mignonne: Do not speak about it.”

So I stood there till the passion of her grief was over, and she rose once more, calm and composed. Mr. de Lusignan threw away his cigar before it was half out, and came back to us.

“Shall we go home now, and leave the Brigand’s Cave for another time?” he asked.

He evidently expected me to say, “As you please;” but the words “Brigand’s Cave” had fired my imagination.

“Oh! do let us see it to-day!” I cried.

Mademoiselle Aubrey, ever kind and considerate, remarked,

“Yes, Mignonne will like it.”

My guardian looked very cross—he evidently wanted to go home. I suppose my fate was on me, for I again said, quite boldly,

“Since you let me choose, I shall like it to be to-day, sir.”

“Oh! you will like it to be to-day,” he said, in his sarcastic way; but he yielded, though with a very ill grace.

I had my wish—a girl’s wish, no more; but I have often wondered what my future lot would have been if that wish had been denied—what other joys and sorrows than those I went through I should have known.

CHAPTER V.

“ **W**ILL Monsieur have any vipers ?” said a shrill, boyish voice, close to us. “ They are the real Fontainebleau vipers, and not dear. I have also got the green lizards.”

Mr. de Lusignan, who looked extremely cross at my decision, turned sharply round on the speaker, a very ragged boy, with a sunburnt face and restless gipsy eyes. He was bare-footed and bare-headed—as wild-looking an urchin as I had ever beheld. He carried a deal box with a glass cover, through which I saw, on one side, the little dark vipers lying very quiet ; and on the other a gorgeous green lizard, so strangely beautiful that I uttered an exclamation of admiration and delight.

“ Do your vipers bite ?” asked Mr. de Lusignan, in a bantering tone.

A very cunning look came to the boy's black eyes.

"They do not want to bite, Monsieur," he answered. "They are very quiet, as you see."

"How do you get them?"

"I go and look for them with my uncle—he charms them."

"Do you charm vipers, too?"

"No; but I hope to do so soon."

He said it greedily, as if the charming of vipers were the height of bliss.

"Can you read or write?"

"No," with profound indifference.

"Would you like to?"

The boy laughed.

"Would you like to be prenticed to some trade?"

The boy laughed again.

"I should run away."

"How do you know?"

"Oh! I have run away twice."

He stood before us as he made the confession, half naked, his unkempt hair falling round his freckled face, tanned with sun and wind—a

young savage in feeling as in look ; but with a wild grace in his bearing that struck me.

“Look at him,” said my guardian to us, in English—“a red Indian is not wilder in his heart than this boy. Give him the forest to roam in, vipers to snare, and travellers to fleece now and then, and what are shoes and stockings, and civilization and its ways, to him ? There,” he added, throwing him a franc, which the boy caught in the air, “take these ladies through the gorges, and bring them out Barbison way. I shall be there with the carriage,” he added, turning to Mademoiselle Aubrey ; and having got rid of our society for an hour, he took out another cigar.

“Of course you know the way ?” he called out to our guide, as we went up the path.

The boy thrust forth his nether lip derisively. “Oh, yes ! he knew the way,” he said.

“Do not forget to show the ladies the Brigand’s Cave,” continued my guardian.

The boy paused, and a dark look came across his face.

“The other boy is there,” he said.

"Oh, I suppose the Cave belongs to the other boy. Are you not friends?" shrewdly added Mr. de Lusignan.

"What right has he to the vipers more than I have?" the lad said, angrily. "Do they not belong to whomsoever can catch them?"

"Most true. Well, at all events, take the ladies to the Cave, and try to have no battle about the vipers to-day. Poor little vipers," I heard him soliloquizing, as he lit his cigar, "must they, too, be a bone of contention in this quarrelsome world?"

The time I spent in Fontainebleau was a very memorable time for me, and hence, perhaps, no spot that I have seen has left traces so deep in my mind as this. I seem to know its rocks and trees, as if they had been familiar to me from childhood upwards. Its scenery is as vivid before me as if I had beheld it yesterday.

How hot the sun was as we passed through those savage gorges!—how weird and grey looked those huge rocks!—how slippery were the glittering pine-needles that carpeted the earth beneath our feet. Mademoiselle Aubrey

soon got tired. She sat down to rest on a ledge of rock in the shade. A pine-tree waved its dark branches above us; the tall bracken fern grew around us as in a forest, the very air was still; there were no sight-seers out, bright though the day was, and the silence of the place was almost oppressive. Mademoiselle Aubrey got into a conversation with our little guide. She, too, drew him out, but not as Mr. de Lusignan had drawn him; under her light and tender hand some gentle traits came forth. This young savage was an orphan, but he had a little sister, and his look softened as he spoke of her. She was so little, and she had such red cheeks, he said; her name was Belle. She had not been christened Belle, but that was her name. He stood leaning against a rock, with his box of reptiles lying at his feet. His look and attitude, his ragged garments, the rock behind him, and a graceful tuft of ferns in a deep dark crevice, made so pretty a picture that I took out a little sketch-book from my pocket and asked him to stay quiet awhile. On this

suggestion the brother vanished at once, and the commercial man came out.

“How much will you give me?” he asked.

I showed him a penny. He laughed scornfully in my face, and displayed his five fingers in so significant a manner, that I laughed too.

“Very well,” I replied; “I shall give you five.”

“Five big ones,” he said, emphatically.

I agreed to the five big ones, and I was going to begin, when he changed his attitude. He flung himself on the earth, closed his eyes, and half-parted his lips.

“What is that?” I asked, a little surprised.

“The viper-charmer dead,” he replied, without moving. “There is a slit in the rock, and the viper is stealing back into it, and the sun is red—quite red on the top of the rock, and the charmer is dead in the shade.”

“I see,” I said, much interested; “you sit to a painter for such a picture—but I like you living, and not dead.”

“So—then,” and he started to his feet, took up his box, and displayed its wares to imagin-

ary customers. "This is the little viper charmer, and the beautiful lady is afraid, and will not buy."

"I understand," remarked Mademoiselle Aubrey; "you sit for two pictures; in one you are living, and in the other dead. And who is it that paints you?"

If she expected to hear the name of one of the celebrated painters who yearly haunt this region, she was disappointed. The boy raised his eyebrows, and shrugged his shoulders. He did not know; the painter lived at Ganne's; he did not know how they called him, and, it was plain, he did not care. The sketch of the little viper-charmer leaning against the rock—for I declined using anyone else's attitudes and ideas—was soon finished; Mademoiselle Aubrey smiled indulgently over it, and we went on.

Middle age is the time for all genuine hobbies, I daresay, but youth is the season for vehement fancies and eager wishing. Ferns were mine just then. I had had ferns, burnt and parched, in the rockwork of Mrs. Dawson's garden, and tended them with unavailing care—and now that

I saw them in all their cool green beauty, with the fresh forest winds blowing through their tender fronds, I went wild with longing. Such as I could reach I captured, but some were as much out of my power as if they had been birds of the air, and I gazed at them in their lofty places with vain desire.

"It is no use, Mignonne," kindly said Mademoiselle Aubrey to me once. "You cannot get them."

"No," I regretfully replied, "I know I cannot, and yet I feel quite sure that one up there is a rare one."

We spoke in English, but our little guide, who was idly chewing a blade of grass, and curiously watching us with his keen eyes, and who had also seen me gathering ferns all the way, knew what I wished for. He said nothing, but quietly putting down his case of reptiles, he climbed up the rock with the agility of a wild cat, and was upon the summit in a moment. The fern grew in a deep, dark crevice, where it lived snugly in cool retirement, like a coy beauty, and was not easy of access.

"Oh! do not break it," I cried. "I would rather leave it, if I cannot have the root."

The lad took a clasp-knife from his pocket, and tried to scoop the fern out, but in the effort his foot slipped on the withered pine-needles with which the slanting rock was thickly covered.

"Take care," I cried.

I spoke too late, for even as I spoke he rolled over the edge of the rock. I saw his scared face flashing before me, his outstretched hand vainly catching at a bunch of grass, then he fell down at our feet with a heavy sound, and there lay an inert mass, his hand still clasping the grass which he had torn from the rock in his fall.

"Good heavens! the child is killed!" cried Mademoiselle Aubrey, white with terror.

We bent over him. He was still unconscious, and pale as death, save where a streak of blood trickled down his forehead. I took out my smelling-bottle, and was trying to revive him, when a huge black dog came barking and bounding up the gorge, then wheeled round us, snuffing inquiringly.

"Neptune," called a man's voice. Then sud-

denly the speaker appeared from behind a rock. He wore a slouched hat, and had all the paraphernalia of an artist strapped to his back, and, from his dog I knew him for the young painter whom we had seen sketching the hollow tree by the roadside.

“ What, my little viper-charmer, dead in good earnest ! ” he exclaimed in a tone of concern.

“ Oh ! Monsieur,” I cried, “ do you think he is dead ? He fell from that high rock.”

With a swift, light hand, the young man tore open the boy’s clothes, and laying his brown breast bare, he felt his heart.

“ Dead, no ! ” he promptly said, “ only stunned. But we should have cold water. You have none, of course ? Wait ! I know where to get some ; or, better still, I shall take him to where it can be found.”

In a moment he had unstrapped and thrown down all his belongings. Then, lifting up the lad as lightly as if his weight were nothing to him, he hoisted him up on his back, and carrying him across his shoulder, he went up the glen at a swift pace.

"Let us follow, Mignonne, that is our way," hurriedly said Mademoiselle Aubrey.

We hastened after the young man, who strode on, with the poor pale face of the boy hanging over his shoulder; whilst, without needing a bidding from his master, Neptune sat gravely down by his property, and stayed there watching us go with sagacious canine eyes.

"Take care, Monsieur," said Mademoiselle Aubrey, anxiously, "the way is steep and trying for you, thus heavily laden."

The painter turned round towards us a young face, with bright yellow hair around it, and answered, with a look and in a tone of surprise,

"Oh! the boy is light as a feather. Besides, though I hope the young rascal is not much hurt, we had better lose no time. You need only follow me if you are going to the Brigand's Cave. We shall soon be there."

And, without saying more, he went on at the same rapid pace.

In a few minutes we had reached the Brigand's Cave. A lad of fifteen stood by the entrance, yawning in the sun. He stared on seeing us,

and his hand, which he had stretched out to take the little faggot with which we were to be lighted down the cave remained for a moment in the attitude, so great was his surprise.

“There, Joseph, get me some cold water for your friend!” cried the painter, gently putting the lad down. “He has got into trouble, as you see.”

“His vipers have bitten him!” exclaimed Joseph (he was a seller of vipers too); and his eyes half started out of his head at the thought.

“No, no, get me the water. He has fallen down a rock.”

Joseph ran to a shed close by, and soon came back with some cold water. Mademoiselle Aubrey took it, and washed the boy’s forehead, whilst the painter, by a more liberal application, soon restored our little guide to consciousness. He had no limbs broken, and had sustained no serious injury, but was still confused and stunned. His first thought was for his vipers. “Where are they?” he said, feebly; and, looking askance at Joseph, he muttered something about his hoping that he (Joseph) had not got

them ; a hint which Joseph received with a smile of calm scorn.

“ Your reptiles are down the gorge, and under the care of Neptune, and therefore perfectly safe,” said the painter. “ Come now, can you walk ?” But the first step the boy took made him utter a cry of pain—he had cut his foot in his fall. “ So I must carry you on to your uncle’s, must I ?” good-humouredly said the young man.

He hoisted the lad up on his back again, and just lifting up his slouched hat from his thick yellow hair, he struck down a path with a cavalier “ *Mesdames, je vous salue.*”

“ Excuse me, Monsieur,” said Mademoiselle Aubrey, hurrying after him, “ but if you will allow us, we will go down the gorge with you.”

He turned round in some surprise.

“ Had you not better go through the Robber’s Den ?” he suggested. “ I am afraid of stumbling with the lad ; but it is the readier way.”

Mademoiselle Aubrey, ever considerate, looked at me, and said,

“ You must see the famous cavern, Mignonne,

for we may never come this way again."

So Joseph lit his faggot, and showed us down a real cave, in which, not a hundred years ago, real thieves had lived. The red light flashed back from the dark walls of rock ; then suddenly we stepped out into the bright daylight, and were once more in a lofty solitude of rock and tree and sky.

"Where are they?" said Mademoiselle Aubrey, looking round her, for neither the painter nor the lad was visible.

They were gone, no doubt for some good reason, and Joseph either would not or could not give us any information as to the route they had probably taken. Indeed, he was singularly reticent concerning his little rival, and professed to know nothing, save that he was an impostor ! Vipers!—his were not real vipers, only shams and counterfeits ; but where the boy lived, or could be found again, was more than he chose to tell.

"Let us go down to Barbison," said Mademoiselle Aubrey, giving him up in despair. "Perhaps your guardian may have seen him."

But when, after hurrying down a steep path, we reached an open space, where the carriage was waiting, and Mr. de Lusignan was finishing his cigar, we found, to our great disappointment, that no young painter with a ragged boy on his back had come that way. Mademoiselle Aubrey's face fell, and she told her brother-in-law our little adventure. He heard her with much composure, and said calmly,

"I daresay your little viper-seller will turn up before long. I expect to see him at the gate of the Fair Gabrielle before the week is out."

"I wish we may," heartily said Mademoiselle Aubrey.

"And I would give anything to know where to find him," I added, warmly; "he was hurt on my account."

"Do not take the matter to heart, Mignonne," half kindly, half laughingly said Mr. de Lusignan. "If your viper-seller does not turn up, as I said, before the week is out, I shall get him for you. Well! you have seen the thieves' den, and *that* is over. We are close to Barbizon; we may as well do that too."

I felt that I was a very great bore.

“ Must we go to Barbison ?” asked Mademoiselle, wistfully.

“ Why not ? ” He spoke so shortly that I ventured to say, as we got into the carriage—

“ Please, sir, I really do not care to see anything more to-day.”

Mr. de Lusignan ignored my remark, and bade the coachman drive us on to Barbison, which was, indeed, close by.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT is called "the whole world" amongst artists, certainly knows that Barbizon is a colony of landscape-painters, some of whom have attained high renown in their art. But of all concerning that "whole world" I was then utterly ignorant, and Barbizon took me by surprise. As we entered the dirty sunburnt street of the little village, I was struck at once with the peculiar aspect of the place. A lady in very dingy white stood talking to a young man in a wide-awake hat, at the door of a little furnished house, with its yellow bill flaunting in the sun. A painter sat sketching the street with its background of forest green, a group of bearded men were lounging a little further. Artists evidently abode here, and so did cocks and hens too, for I heard a good deal of crowing and cack-

ling, and saw some farm-houses with their inevitable dunghills.

"And there is Ganne's!" said Mr. de Lusignan, with a twinkle in his eye. "Get down, and look at that sign, Mignonne."

He was once more quite good-humoured, and helped us to alight at the door of a little inn. Is the famous signboard which I saw then hanging there still? I suppose so. It amused me much, reckless though was the humour in which it had been painted. The laughing, jovial head of the innkeeper appeared in the centre of the board, and on either side, a painter, his wife, and his dog had been depicted. But on one side this family party was entering the inn in a state of leanness comparable only to that of Pharaoh's lean kine; and, on the other, it was shown as leaving that home of good cheer so burdened with flesh, that the three, husband, wife, and dog, could hardly move. I laughed at this broad caricature till the tears ran down my cheeks.

"There are more inside, Mignonne," said Mr. de Lusignan, who was chuckling internally.

There were more indeed! The parlour was panelled with them. There was not an inch of spare room on the walls. Landscapes, which told of many a young artist's wanderings in far-away lands; allegories, caricatures, dashing roysterers' scenes, all appeared there pell-mell, each bearing those individual tokens which are as significant in pictures as features in the human face.

"There are more in another room," said a young girl, who stood waiting to know what we were going to order.

We crossed the yard and the kitchen, and entered a much smaller room, where the cloth was laid for us.

"I wonder, Mignonne, if we could get tidings of our handsome young painter here?" said Mademoiselle Aubrey, addressing me. "Do you not think it was to him our viper-seller sat—and did he not say that he lived at Ganne's?"

I replied that I thought so.

"And we could identify him by his beauty," continued Mademoiselle Aubrey musingly. "It

is not likely there should be two such handsome men in one house."

I opened my eyes and stared.

"Was he handsome, Mademoiselle?"

"Bless the child!" she answered gaily, "he was the greatest beauty of his sex that I ever saw. Did you not notice it?"

"I saw that he was young, and had a good deal of yellow hair," I answered, "but I did not notice that he was so very handsome."

"Perhaps Mignonne does not know what beauty is," suggested Mr. de Lusignan, with mock gravity.

"I am afraid of it," answered Mademoiselle Aubrey; "for indeed my young painter was wonderfully handsome—and, what is more, he looked as kind as he was beautiful. He spoke French very well, too, and yet I fancy he is not a Frenchman."

I suppose Mr. de Lusignan had already enough of the argument, for he sat down in the window and looked out into the street, with a gaze that had become suddenly moody. Mademoiselle Aubrey looked at him, and a

cloud came over her cheerful face ; then with a half sigh she too sat down, and turned her chair so that her back was to the light. I vaguely felt that some chill breath from the depths of the past had come over them both—some memory of that time which was a blank to me.

It was very uncomfortable to see these two so cheerless. I tried to look at the paintings on the cupboard doors. I have forgotten what they were about, but I know that one cupboard opened in the very middle of the picture, ruthlessly dividing a poor dog in two. I was looking at him, wondering how he liked it, and if he would stay thus for ever, with his two halves parting every time napkins and table-cloths were wanted, when a light sound behind me made me turn round.

The door of the room had opened gently, and a lady in black stood on the threshold, with her hand on the lock. The light from the window in which Mr. de Lusignan was sitting fell on her face, and the gloom of the inn kitchen was behind her. She stood irresolute for a moment—

the fairest of pictures on that homely background—during which I looked at her in breathless admiration. Never, even in my dreams, had I seen a creature so handsome as this woman. The brown hair with golden gleams, the deep blue eyes, the perfect profile, the lovely mouth, the head of classic beauty, and figure of nymph-like grace—she had them all, and with them the bloom of little more than twenty years. She stood irresolute for one moment, as I said; then, with a quiet bend of her stately head, she entered the room, took up a book lying on a chair, and the next moment she was gone. When the door closed upon her, we all three stared at each other. My guardian drew a long breath.

“What a splendid creature!” he said, his brown eyes sparkling. “What an exquisite head!”

“And what a figure!” said his sister-in-law.

“I never did see such a beautiful woman!” I cried.

“*You* never did see!” echoed Mademoiselle Aubrey, with good-humoured emphasis on the

pronoun. “Why, the young painter was much handsomer, and you never saw it.”

“Handsomer than that lady ! Oh ! Mademoiselle, is that possible ?”

“My dear, it is a fact, I assure you. He was quite an Apollo.”

I could not believe it ; and we had a hot argument, like that of the Fairy and the Geni in the Arabian tale, each averring the beauty of his or her favourite ; but, unluckily, Mr. de Lusignan could not act as umpire.

“She’s English,” he said musingly, when our contest relaxed ; “and yet I have seen a head like hers in the Vatican.”

He had ordered an omelette to begin with. It now came in. Mr. de Lusignan, whose will was his law, said to the girl who laid the dish on the table,

“Does not this room belong to the English lady who came here for a book just now ?”

“Oh ! no,” replied the girl, coolly, “Madame Smith sits here sometimes, but it is not her room.”

“English ! I said so !” triumphantly exclaimed

Mr. de Lusignan, addressing his sister-in-law, as the girl left us. "But how I do hate that Smith," he added, with a look of the deepest disgust. "He is the greatest, the most notorious imposter this earth ever bore. When young Charles Stuart and princely Buckingham go off on their wild quest to Spain, they travel through England as Tom and John Smith. When Louis Philippe takes flight, he is Mr. Smith forthwith; and if a woman wants to hide in an out-of-the-way place, she becomes Madame Smith at once. Thieves, cheats, and the rest, are all Smiths, as a matter of course. Smith, in short, means Anonymous, or Anonyma, as the case may be. Everyone knows it, and everyone does it. I have no doubt that if I wanted to abscond, or to hide, I, too, should become a Smith."

"Oh! I wish we could see her again!" I exclaimed, eagerly. "Oh! if I only could draw such a face as that!"

"You volatile creature! Were you not all for an old gate yesterday? And do you want a lovely young face to-day? Now I, who do not draw, am speculating about Monsieur Smith.

What is he like? Good gracious! only think, Mignonne, if he should be a burly, red-faced John Bull, with goggle eyes! Hideous, yet very probable! Beautiful women like coarse, ugly men, as a rule."

"Perhaps there is no Monsieur Smith," I said, rather indignant at this vision of a goggle-eyed husband.

"Perhaps there is not. Only, what would bring a beautiful widow to a painter's inn like this?"

No one answered this awkward question. Mademoiselle Aubrey, indeed, purposely changed the subject; but when Mr. de Lusignan left us to smoke a cigar, he no doubt managed to learn something more about Madame Smith, for he said, rather drily, as he joined us again,

"You were right, Mignonne, there is no Monsieur Smith; but there is a Master Smith. Two years old."

"And is she really living here alone?" I exclaimed.

"What if she is, my dear?" said Mademoiselle Aubrey, good-humouredly. "Beautiful ladies

are often eccentric ; for beauty is power, and its possessors rely upon it to follow their own whim, whatever that whim may be."

" No," said Mr. de Lusignan, " such is not the case. Mrs. Smith" —I noticed he did not say Madame Smith—" has been here two days, and leaves to-morrow. She has taken a furnished house at the other end of the village, and is only waiting till it is empty to leave the inn."

I wondered if the child was as beautiful as its mother, but Mr. de Lusignan could give me no information on that head. We had seen all there was to be seen ; it was time to go, and we entered the open carriage that had brought us, and which was now waiting in the sunny street outside the gate. I looked up at the sign-board once more, and, in doing so, I saw a child's head looking down at us from an open window.

" I wonder if that is Mrs. Smith's little boy ?" I whispered to my guardian. He mechanically raised his eyes. For awhile his look expressed no more than curiosity ; then, all at once, a change so deep, so sudden, and so strange passed

across his face, that I was confounded. I looked from him to Mademoiselle Aubrey. She was ashy white, and shook visibly. I stared at them both, then looked up at the child again. He was still gazing down at us, a pale, sallow child, with dark eyes, and a serious little round face, and behind him, further back in the shadowy part of the room, I perceived the beautiful woman, his mother.

“ Harry, take care,” she said, in a pleasant, ringing voice.

The boy neither moved nor answered. He continued looking down at us, with the imper-
turbable gravity of childhood. All this time
the driver had been searching for his whip,
which had got astray. He found it at last, and
clambered up to his seat. He gave us a look;
my guardian merely nodded, and we drove
away.

I looked at Mr. de Lusignan and at Mademoi-
selle Aubrey—neither minded me; they were
staring at each other with a significant intent-
ness which I had never seen in their looks
before. If I had not been there, they would

have spoken; but something had happened which each knew, and the other understood—something that was a secret and a mystery to me. Mr. de Lusignan was very moody all the way home. When we alighted, he said to Mademoiselle Aubrey,

“I should like to speak to you for a few moments.”

“Very well,” she answered.

They did not enter the house, but leaving me on the steps, at once walked away in the grounds. I stood looking after their two figures as they went down an alley, all aglow with the redness of the setting sun. I confess it, I would have given anything to know the subject of that discourse, which made their two heads almost meet as they talked, which made them walk with steps so uncertain and so slow, and once kept them standing still, as if everything else in this world were forgotten. What could it all be about? I stood looking after them in unconscious curiosity, till the housemaid’s black eyes, staring down at me from an upper window in evident inquisitiveness, recalled me to

myself. I went up to my room, and looked at the gate, and even took out my sketch-book; but it would not do. I suppose I should not have been mortal if I had not tried to conjecture what the nature of Mr. de Lusignan's secret could be. My surmises were wild enough, yet not wilder than the truth, and so near it that they are not worth recording here.

I was as watchful as a young mouse during the whole of dinner-time, pricking up my little ears for every crumb of information; but none fell from the lips of my two companions. Mademoiselle Aubrey was silent and abstracted, and Mr. de Lusignan, though restless, was more capricious and wayward than ever, and said not a word which could enlighten me. When dinner was over, he went out for a stroll, and Mademoiselle Aubrey sat down to read in one of the drawing-room windows, making the most of the fading light. I sat by another window, and being virtuously resolved not to look at her, I took instead a survey of the pale shadowy walls of the room. It was a large one, and was adorned by ancient prints in black frames, very

large, very hard, and very dry. They all represented Dutch landscapes, with most unjoyous Dutch boors drinking beneath the porches of neat Dutch inns. My guardian said they were valuable, but they chilled my heart; and in the secret of that heart I hated them. The grey faded doors, with their Louis XV. carvings of grey flowers and fruit, hanging in grey wreaths, were a little more seductive to the eye; but I soon got tired of them. The next object of interest was a stately sofa, with a wiry back, and thin wiry legs, that always made me think of it as a shaky old gentleman requiring my merciful consideration, and not to be sat upon unless in some hour of dire need. This remarkable piece of furniture, and its offspring, four arm-chairs and six chairs, all standing straight against the walls, were covered with antique yellow silk, on which diminutive sprigs of faded roses and periwinkles had told to dead-and-buried generations the sweet story of bygone Springs; but they had nothing to say to me now, and being still virtuously bent on not watching my silent companion, I looked

hard at two tall and narrow looking-glasses, facing each other, and across whose gloomy surface shot a few gleams of the light from without. When even this would not do, I leaned out of the window, and looked at the flagged terrace, at the vases of scarlet geraniums, and at my dear old gate, with its garland of tender green stirring gently on the evening air. The cook was still busy below, and a faint clatter of dishes and saucepans rose from the kitchen; but the housemaid, the gardener, and my guardian's courier, were all standing outside the gate in the quiet street, talking and laughing together; whilst far away an organ was playing "Partant pour la Syrie."

"I suppose I can look at her now, and not be inquisitive," I thought, a little crossly, at the end of a quarter of an hour; and look I did, and with a not unnatural re-action of feeling, I did not take my eyes off of Mademoiselle Aubrey for the next half hour. All that my looking told me was that she did not turn the pages of her book once during that time, but that she

sighed twice, and both times very sadly, and even weariedly.

I did not see my guardian again that evening, and he did not appear at breakfast the next morning. He was gone out for the day, Mademoiselle Aubrey told me. “Is he gone to Barbison?” was on the tip of my tongue; though, of course, I did not say so. Of course, too, my imagination went wild again; but I was not kept long in suspense. As I sat alone in my room, and began to think that of all unpleasant, awkward positions, to be an unwilling and excluded third in a family secret, was the most unpleasant and awkward, Mademoiselle Aubrey’s voice asking outside, “May I come in?” put the ungracious mood to flight. I ran to open to her with sudden gladness. She was as pleasant to me as sunshine on a dark day, and as welcome.

“I have come to show you something, Mignonne,” she said—“look!”

She put a miniature in my hand. It was the portrait of a boy of three or four years of age—a pale boy, with a little serious round face and solemn big black eyes. I uttered a cry.

“Surely,” I exclaimed, “that is not the child we saw yesterday?”

“No, it is not,” she quietly replied; “this boy was Mr. de Lusignan’s son, and my nephew.”

I looked at the portrait again, then at Mademoiselle Aubrey. I did not know what to say.

“Mr. de Lusignan is gone to Barbison,” she resumed; “and before he went he said to me, ‘You may tell her.’ I think he was right. Mysteries are awkward things, and very useless.”

I felt much agitated, and also much flattered by this proof of my guardian’s confidence, and with the impulsiveness of my years, I cried eagerly—

“Oh! Mr. de Lusignan may be sure I shall not tell a soul!”

“My good child,” she answered, laying her hand on my arm with an amused smile, “what soul have you to tell in Fontainebleau?”

This was very true, but I none the less coloured up in some indignation at the unflattering remark. Mademoiselle Aubrey continued—

“By the time we leave this place, the mystery will be solved, and Mr. de Lusignan will not care about it; and in the meanwhile, he takes you into his confidence, because he would not be under the restraint of excluding you.”

I was silent. If I looked as I felt, I fear I must have looked very sulky. With her usual composure, Mademoiselle Aubrey resumed :

“Your guardian is gone to Barbison, because he thinks that the child whom we saw there yesterday is the child of his dead son.”

All my ill-humour vanished. I had thought this very thing, yet I was startled and half frightened to hear it spoken.

“Does he really?” I said, under my breath.

“He does, and”—after a pause—“so do I.”

My emotion kept me speechless; for when we are young, we take most things, whether they concern us or not, a good deal to heart.

“I know,” she continued, “how improbable it seems that, amongst the many hundred thousand British babies, this particular baby—he is scarcely more—should be Mr. de Lusignan’s

grandson ; and yet I believe that boy to be my nephew Henry's child."

I was rather startled to hear this, for though I had not thought about it, the large number of British babies thus alluded to by Mademoiselle Aubrey did stagger me for a moment. She went on—

"The coincidences in this case are peculiar and striking. Mr. de Lusignan discovered, after his son's death, that Henry had been married in a little country church in Surrey, under the name of Henry Lusignan Smith, to a girl called Louisa Jones. All the inquiries he set on foot to learn more failed till this morning, when he received a letter, informing him that on the very day when Henry was married, a young and remarkably handsome woman, who gave the name of Mrs. Smith, but who offered no references, as she stated that she had just come from abroad, took quiet lodgings at Notting Hill. She expected her husband that night, she said. He came, but so late that Mrs. Wood, the landlady, did not see him. She tried to get a glimpse of him the next morning, but he

had already left the house. Mrs. Smith stayed ten days at Notting Hill. At the end of that time she left suddenly, forfeiting nearly three weeks' rent—driven away, I have no doubt, by the curiosity of her landlady; for, spite all her attempts to do so, Mrs. Wood never succeeded in seeing Mr. Smith's face. She knew he was young by his gait and carriage, but she knew no more. After Mrs. Smith was gone, Mrs. Wood found in her lodger's room an old visiting card, which had been used to label a trunk. This card she saved up with the curiosity of her class, and sold for the moderate sum of one guinea to the Private Inquiry Office agent, by whom these scanty particulars have been discovered. It was enclosed in the letter which Mr. de Lusignan got this morning. It is torn and soiled, but on one side "Mrs. Smith" is written in a bold hand, of which it is impossible to say whether it be a man's or a woman's, and, on the other, are engraved Mr. de Lusignan's own name and address. When your guardian told me, yesterday evening, the suspicions which the likeness of the little stranger at Barbison to

his dead son had raised in his mind, I acknowledged the resemblance, but refused to draw any inference from it ; but I confess that this morning, after reading the letter and seeing the card, I altered my mind. Do what I will, I cannot help thinking now that the Mrs. Smith whom we saw yesterday is my nephew's widow."

I had heard her open-eyed and open-mouthed in eager excitement. I now remarked—

“ Why should she hide, Mademoiselle ?”

“ Perhaps she is not hiding ; perhaps she never knew her husband's real name ; but, I confess, I do not think that likely. My impression is that she hates and fears Mr. de Lusignan, and will let him have no sort of hold upon her or her child.”

“ But why should she hate and fear him ?” I exclaimed. Then, feeling, by my companion's silence, how indiscreet in me it was to question, I coloured up, and said hastily, “ I beg your pardon ; I did not mean to—to be rude.”

“ Of course not. Well, Mignonne, we are our own mistresses to-day—what shall we do ?”

I longed to see the gardens, of which I had got glimpses from the palace windows; I said so, and to the gardens after luncheon we went.

I love gardens; I love them dearly. I do not ask them to give me the wild grace of nature, no more than I ask them for her careless majesty. The forest, the wilderness, the barren sea-shore, the endless plain, are hers. If we want her, let us seek her there, and she will give us raptures with which no garden delights can compare. But let us not lay profane hands on her domain, or try to write down her solemn beauties on one little page. She is both limitless and inimitable. She will not be enclosed within walls, and laughs at all our small counterfeits, at our vain attempts to imprison her, with a mighty yet sorrowful scorn. If I love gardens, therefore, I do not love them as being the epitomes, the *multum in parvo* of the great and gracious mother. I love them because they are not open, but enclosed, little green islands scattered over the land, that man may have shade and sunshine, the beauty of flowers, the freshness of waters, and call

them his. They give me that very sense of sweet security which it is the subtle charm of nature to dispel. There is secret awe in the aspect of the tamest landscape, but in gardens, whatever Royal majesty and splendour may be thrown over them, there is none. Let them be as they like, cool and shady, with winding alleys and waterfalls, and shining lakes, I feel this as keenly as when they are trim and formal, with avenues of clipped trees, *parterres* of garish flowers, and statues that stand for ever motionless in the hot sun, and never shrink from chill Autumn blasts, through all the weary years that pass over them.

I went into almost equal raptures with the two gardens which Fontainebleau possesses. The day was hot, and during its early hours we found the Jardin Anglais delightfully cool and green. We left it when the power of the scorching sun abated, and I fed the carps in the pond which divides the modern from the old *parterre*. Hoary carps, as frisky and as greedy as if they had been carps in their teens, tumbled over one another in shoals, and fought valiantly

for the bread I threw to them with a liberal hand. With the eyes of faith, I fear, I saw their collars of gold glittering through the sunny water.

“I see them, indeed I do,” I cried to my companion, who stood by me, leaning on the balustrade, and looking down passively.

“Do you?” she said, and sighed so wearily, as it seemed to me, that I asked eagerly if we should not go home.

“Not till you have seen the *parterre*, Mignonne.”

The fashion of Fontainebleau never visits the *parterre*. Officers never lounge there, looking much bored, and officers’ wives (Fontainebleau is a garrison town) never go to sit and read novels in its alleys, or watch their children at play, as they all do in the Jardin Anglais. The *parterre*, so royal once, is very plebeian now. Louis XIII. and Richelieu, Christina and Monaldeschi, Louis XIV., and the tender-hearted La Vallière, have been succeeded by old women in caps, poorly-clad children, who tumble on the grass unchecked; dogs who scamper about

in great glee, and valetudinarians who sit in the warm alleys, safe from the treacherous rheumatism that lurks in the well-watered Jardin Anglais. And yet this old *parterre* is forsaken, not neglected. Gardeners are ever at work to keep it as neat and trim as if Madame de Maintenon herself were going to step down from her rooms in the palace, and take a stately walk along her own solemn avenue. The old-fashioned quaintness of the place won my heart, and when we came to an ancient high-roofed and ivy-clad little house, standing all alone in a grassy plot, where it overlooked the bright flowers below, and the central fountain, with its waters dancing gaily in the sun, I uttered an exclamation of delight.

“Oh! that dear little house!” I cried aloud; and to myself I thought, “How delightful it would be to live with dear James Carr in so neat and tidy an abode as was this!”

“I wonder who lived there formerly?” I said to Mademoiselle Aubrey. She had sat down to rest on a bench, and was looking round her wistfully. But she heard me, for she replied:

“A good and wise man, Mignonne. Sully, the minister of Henry the Fourth. Other men have lived in it since that day, yet the place bears his name, and is still called Pavillon de Sully. I believe the palace architect lives there now.”

“Why, how well you know Fontainebleau!” I said, heedlessly.

“Yes,” she answered, very sadly, “I do.”

She bowed her head, and I saw the tears stealing down her cheeks. This part of the gardens was lonely just then, and no stranger could see us.

“I beg your pardon,” I exclaimed, much distressed. “I ought to know better. Of course you were here formerly, with—with your nephew.”

“Yes, and with another too,” she answered, in a low voice. “I showed you a portrait, Mignonne, but at the back of that is another which you did not see.” I sat down by her. My perplexity and my wonder were in my face, I suppose, for she added, in the same low tones, “I will tell you all about it some day. Let us look at the Pavillon de Sully now.”

We walked round it, then we came back to the bench and sat down again. The gardens were still very quiet, and only a few children were playing on the grass-plot near us. A young girl with a rosy face was looking out of the window in the pavillon. Was she the architect's daughter? How nice if James were the architect of this grand old place! What walks we could have in those dear old gardens, and what drives we should take in the green forest!

"My dear, I will tell you now," said Mademoiselle Aubrey, whose thoughts had not gone woolgathering like mine.

I gave a little start, and in a moment was all attention.

CHAPTER VII.

“**M**Y second situation as a governess was with your guardian’s brother. He was a struggling barrister, and my salary was low ; but Agnes, my pupil, was docile and intelligent, and both Mr. de Lusignan and his little sickly wife were very kind to me. Our home, however, was not a comfortable one. We lived in a large house in Russell Square, which was nearly empty. It was Mrs. de Lusignan’s own house, and I often thought her husband had married her for it. She was always moaning about the taxes. ‘So heavy, you know, Mademoiselle Aubrey ; and we could have such a nice villa somewhere for the money, or, at least, a little more ; but Mr. de Lusignan is *so* obstinate.’ I had been two years with them, when

they kindly asked my sister Maria, who was music-teacher in a school in Paris, to come and spend her holidays with me. She was very, very beautiful; your guardian was then a young man; he fell desperately in love with her, and married her before her visit to me was over. I loved her dearly, for was she not my sister, my solitary tie of flesh and blood in a strange country? But we had seen very little of each other since our childhood; our two lives had flowed apart. I was young, too, in these days, and when she died, soon after the birth of her child, I grieved sorely for her, but with no incurable sorrow; and she soon became to me as a shadow of the past.

“ Blood is strong, no doubt; but the affections of a poor governess are apt to stray from her own kin, and to get bound to the strangers among whom her lot is cast. I liked that poor, weak, ailing, foolish Mrs. de Lusignan, who got to lean upon me in all her household troubles, asking me for that strength which she so sadly needed. I got, too, to like dearly her second and last child, a boy born on the same day, and

bearing the same name with my little nephew, and who, baby though he was, loved me better than mother, nurse, sister, or father. Our Harry was two years old when his poor mother died. Sick people have strange fancies. She made me promise never to desert her children, and her husband never to part them from me. She was on her death-bed, and we both pledged ourselves to obey her.

And now, Mignonne, will a young thing like you understand me? Can you realize what it is to rear a child? Do you know what a child is?—how wayward, how endearing, how beautiful, how perverse! My Harry was all this; and he became the apple of my eye, the darling of my heart. I nursed him through all his ailments, and he had many. Night after night I sat by him as he lay moaning; and when I thought that my watching might soon be over, that the little querulous, wailing voice might soon be silent, that the little crib might soon be as empty as a bird's nest when the young birds have flown out on the Summer air, I felt as if my heart must break; but it did not, for he

lived, and as he grew sturdy and strong, I became ambitious for his sake. Your guardian owes his wealth to his cousin and godfather, the banker; but my Mr. de Lusignan was poor. Money was scarce at Russell Square. I was housekeeper, as well as nurse and governess. To save money, and to keep my darling as long as I could, I learned as much Greek and Latin as enabled me to teach him. He was a rarely-gifted boy. His quickness and his memory were wonderful. There was a touch of genius in him too. And then he was so brave, so generous, so manly, and so true that he made every heart his. Your guardian would have given anything to have his Harry like ours. My poor sister's child was indolent, vacillating, and obstinate. He was kind-hearted, but he failed in energy; even in that energy which enables the erring to bear the brunt of their own sins.

“The two cousins were much attached, and Mr. de Lusignan generously resolved that they should be as brothers, and enjoy the same advantages of education; so he took my Harry

from us when he was twelve years old. Ah ! many and many a time I have wished that he had not been so kind, but had left my boy to me. For his kindness was fatal to us all. The first mischief was that, whilst my nephew stumbled at every step in his studies, my Harry reached the goal almost without an effort ; but the worst was that Mr. de Lusignan's son, being weak, leaned on his cousin, who was strong, and made him bear the burden of his sins ; so Mr. de Lusignan, who already felt some natural jealousy of his son's inferiority, began to mistrust the companion he had given him ; and yet he loved him—he could not help it. Every dog fawned upon my Harry ; every child smiled in his face ; every man and woman who came near him rejoiced in his honest brown eyes—in his cheery voice and frank smile. My nephew was much the handsomer lad of the two, but everyone loved Harry best.

“The two lads were fifteen when we all came on a visit to Mr. de Lusignan, who had taken a little château near Fontainebleau, for the Summer. I forgot to tell you, Mignonne,

that my Mr. de Lusignan had then been married two years to his second wife, a rich widow."

"Were you happy with that lady?" I quickly asked.

"Never mind, my dear," she replied, with a smile. "Agnes was a good girl, and though she never was to me what her brother had been, I remembered my promise to her dead mother, and we did not part till Mr. de Lusignan died. She then remained with her step-mother, got married, and went to India, where she is still, and I came to keep house for your guardian. The house in Russell Square was sold, and that English home, where the best and happiest years of my life had been spent, was broken up, as, many years before, my French home had been laid waste and made desolate by death."

I looked at Mademoiselle Aubrey, and she smiled and shook her head.

"No, Mignonne," she said, "there was no romance between my Harry's father and me, if that is what you mean. I should not have said him nay, if he had asked me to become his wife —I was too fond of my darling for that; but I

felt no pang of jealousy when he chose another woman, and put me by. I am not the heroine of my little tale, Mignonne ; I am only the looker-on, whose business it is to see things as they pass, and tell them again to a younger generation.

“ We had been a week at Jussienne—that was the name of Mr. de Lusignan’s château—when there occurred an event which ruled all my Harry’s life. I was sitting with Agnes in a room on the ground-floor, when the two boys looked in at us through the open window. They both had their tin cases and green nets. Henry, my nephew, cared little for botany or natural history ; but his cousin Harry—we called him so to distinguish them—was bitten by both, and had infected him. They looked in at us, as I said, and when I saw their two handsome, boyish faces, bright as the sun which shone upon them, I felt as if I could have looked at my fair nephew and my dark Harry—so different, though so much alike—for ever. For surely, if there be a beautiful thing upon earth, it is youth in its early strength and promise.

Ah ! how strange it would have seemed to me then if anyone had told me that I was to outlive these two.

“ ‘ We are going out,’ said my Harry, in his gay young voice.

“ ‘ Where to ?’ asked Mr. de Lusignan, so abruptly, that we all started.

“ ‘ We are going Brunoy way, uncle,’ answered Harry, turning towards a part of the garden which my look could not reach.

“ ‘ Do not mistake your direction,’ said Mr. de Lusignan, sharply.

“ Again it was Harry who answered.

“ ‘ On my word, uncle,’ he replied, earnestly.

“ ‘ Very well,’ said your guardian, and I heard his step walking away along the gravelled path.

Jussienne was within a league of this forest to which we drove daily, but your guardian had strictly forbidden the boys to go to it alone. He is a sensitive man, and to have these two lads wandering alone in that forest, which covers I do not know how many square miles, would have made him as wretchedly nervous as

any woman. My Harry was then in all the fervour of a young botanist's first season, and he felt the prohibition keenly. None of the princes who vainly attempted to enter the forest where the enchanted beauty lay sleeping, ever looked at its green skirts of trees more longingly than he looked at the dark rim that was visible from all our windows.

"There must be such ferns there," he used to say to me; "I am sure I could get the Osmunda Regalis, if uncle would only let us go."

"But he will not," I answered, "so do not attempt it."

"Would that be a deadly sin?" asked Harry, with a laugh.

"My dear boy," I persisted, "your uncle is very fond of you, but he would never forgive wilful disobedience."

Harry did not answer, but he laughed again. He would not have taken the matter so lightly, if he had known Mr. de Lusignan half as well as I did.

"And now, Mignonne, you know why Mr. de Lusignan spoke so sharply to the two boys,

and why Harry's replies were so earnest. Well, the long Summer day passed, and the lads did not come back. The dinner-bell rang, and when we met in the dining-room, Mr. de Lusignan looked black as night—his brother happened to be in Paris for a few days—for neither Henry nor Harry appeared. I felt very uneasy, but never spoke till Agnes, who has a gift for unlucky speeches, remarked—

“ ‘I hope they did not go to the forest.’ ”

“ Mr. de Lusignan dropped knife and fork with a clang.

“ ‘They had better not,’ he said, so angrily that a dead silence fell on us all. Dinner was over, and still these two boys did not come. We went out into the garden, and sat there. Mr. de Lusignan remained in the dining-room, but he was not drinking. He paced the room up and down, never pausing, never ceasing. At first I could see him from where I sat, and never had I seen his face look so angry; but, as the daylight faded, it became indistinct, then, when twilight set in, it vanished. I only saw a dark figure moving to and fro; I only heard

that unceasing step, which made me think of a tiger in his cage. You may laugh, Mignonne; Mr. de Lusignan laughed too, when, after this was all over, I told him what my impressions had been. When ten struck, I could bear it no longer. I went up to one of the open windows and said to him—

“ ‘ Mr. de Lusignan, what will you do ? ’

“ ‘ What about ? ’ he asked, sharply, and suddenly standing still as he said it.

“ ‘ Those children.’

“ ‘ And what do you want me to do ? ’ he asked, with a burst of passion. ‘ Do you know where they went to ? ’

“ ‘ No more than you do,’ I answered, quietly.

“ ‘ Well, then, nothing can be done,’ he rejoined, sharply ; and he began pacing the room up and down once more.

“ At eleven, we all went up to our respective rooms. Mr. de Lusignan choosing to do nothing, no one ventured to interfere. I sat up alone in my room, feeling utterly wretched. At twelve, I heard some one leaving the house, and riding away. I guessed it was Mr. de .

Lusignan ; but his quest at such an hour was useless, of course. I heard him coming back towards six in the morning. He looked very haggard when we all met at breakfast, but spoke no more of the absent boys than if they had not existed. However, matters were not so desperate as they had seemed, for, before our dreary meal was half over, the truants came in. Mr. de Lusignan's sullen face turned white as he heard their voices in the hall, but he went on drinking his coffee. Agnes, who looked much scared, did not dare to stir. Her stepmother, who was very fond of Harry, said—

“ ‘Thank Heaven ! that is a relief !’ And, for my part, I do not mind telling you, Mignonne, that when I heard my Harry’s voice, I could not contain myself, but burst into tears. They entered the room together, Harry leading the way, Henry skulking behind him. His sullen, defiant look told me at once that he, and he only, was to blame ; but my poor boy was spokesman, and, as usual, bore the brunt of his uncle’s wrath.

“ ‘ We are very sorry, uncle,’ he began.

“‘For what?’ asked Mr. de Lusignan, putting down his cup and looking amazed.

“Poor Harry flushed up to the roots of his brown hair. When Mr. de Lusignan is quiet, and not impetuous, he is very angry indeed.

“‘For having made you anxious about us,’ continued Harry, simply.

“Mr. de Lusignan stared.

“‘Anxious about two young men of such rare discretion,’ he said, sarcastically; ‘my dear fellow, is *that* possible?’

“I saw my poor boy biting his nether lip; but he only said, earnestly,

“‘Uncle, we are very sorry.’

“He said no more; he gave no explanation; he volunteered no statement. Now there passed a meaning in Mr. de Lusignan’s eyes which boded no good to the speaker. Of course you know, my dear, that your guardian has remarkably large brown eyes, which are keen or gentle, flashing or mellow, as he pleases. Well, all the de Lusignans had these eyes. Even my fair nephew, who was like his mother in all else, had his father’s eyes; and this was the only

trait either of body or of mind which was common to these two. Well, as I was telling you, there passed in Mr. de Lusignan's eyes a meaning that boded no good to the boys, and I read that angry meaning back again in Henry's. Still, it was not he, but Harry who spoke.

“ ‘ We were going towards Brunoy, as I told you, uncle, but we missed the right road—’

“ ‘ And went in the opposite direction,’ suggested Mr. de Lusignan, sarcastically.

“ ‘ Yes, we went in the opposite direction,’ replied Harry, simply. He spoke calmly, not defiantly—more like an erring man, who can bear the consequences of his error, than like a disobedient boy, who neither knows how to obey, nor how to receive reproof.

“ ‘ To the forest, I suppose?’ continued his uncle.

“ ‘ Yes, to the forest,’ said Harry ; but I could read the keenest pain in his honest face as he thus acknowledged having broken his word.

“ ‘ To get specimens, &c.,’ continued Mr. de Lusignan, sarcastically ; ‘ the Fontainebleau viper, &c.’

“ Harry did not answer.

“ ‘ May I ask to know where you both spent the night ? ’ said Mr. de Lusignan, in another tone.

“ ‘ In an empty lodge in the forest. We got in at the window ; left it with dawn this morning, and made our way here.’

“ On hearing this, his uncle’s anger broke out into speech. He was white with passion ; his eyes blazed ; his lips quivered ; he had suffered agonies for these two boys ; and as his pain had been, so was his wrath—excessive. It was terrible to see it ; and I felt half sick. Neither Mrs. de Lusignan nor Agnes ventured to utter a word in favour of the two culprits ; and when I spoke, I was not heeded at first. But at length I helped to calm him a little.

“ ‘ Very well,’ he said, turning to Harry, ‘ let this be over ; but remember two things : the next time you tempt my son into disobedience, I shall part you two for ever ; also that, though I forgive yesterday’s work, I shall never forget it.’ And to his own sorrow, as well as to Harry’s, he never did.

"I do not think Mr. de Lusignan ever asked to know the particulars of this escapade. I fancied he did not mind laying the blame on poor Harry, in order not to feel too angry with his own son. I had no such feelings; and under promise of secrecy, I got the truth from Harry. Henry had deliberately gone to the forest, and Harry had followed him with a sore heart.

"And now, my dear, I must skip a few years, or I shall never have done. Harry's father is dead, Agnes is married, the two lads are young men now, and they live with your guardian, for whom I am keeping house, in an old mansion at Hampstead, which he has taken on a long lease. It was a beautiful place, with lovely grounds around it, and I spent there two happy years.

"I had a pleasant little sitting-room of my own, and Harry never missed once coming to chat in the evening with me. I expected him, and always sat up for him, however late it might be. Henry was very kind to me, but he never came. One evening I noticed that Harry was grave and absent. He sat staring at the fire, with his elbows on his knees, and his head

resting on his two hands. He never said a word, and looked drearily moody. I thought this might be in consequence of some advice I had been giving him, and I said,

“ ‘ Have you spoken to your uncle yet ? ’

“ ‘ About my prospects ? No, auntie.’

“ He called me auntie now. I laid my hand on his arm, and looked down in his handsome face.

“ ‘ My dear lad,’ I said, ‘ your uncle once said to me, “ Let us make men of them,” and he has spared no expense on you two boys. You have travelled and seen the world. You have studied all that can be studied by young men of your years, and you know a great deal more than most young men know. You are good classic scholars ; you speak several foreign languages ; you have a fair knowledge of abstract and natural sciences. You have both had a princely education, but remember that Henry, if he knows all these things by no means so well as you do, has a kingdom waiting for him, and that you have not.’

“ ‘ Auntie, I can always join some exploring

expedition,' he replied, coolly. 'I have no profession ; but Africa, or the North Pole, is open to me.'

"He had already spoken of this thing, but Mr. de Lusignan would not listen to him, and I thought he had given it up. I felt quite scared at hearing it mentioned again.

"'Are you thinking of it?' I asked.

"'I am, auntie, more than ever.'

"I gave him a look, and I seemed to read his face as though it had been a book.

"'You have a trouble?'

"'I have, auntie,' he replied.

"He said no more ; but all at once I guessed the truth—my Harry's trouble was love. My boys were no longer children, and to one of them, or to both, that trouble, the great trouble of youth, had come. You look at me, Mignonne, and your young eyes brighten. You think there is a love-story coming. A love story there was, of course, a sad one in its progress, a tragic one in its close ; but I cannot tell it to you. I saw it as we see a landscape through a mist, a green glimpse here and there, then a great white

blank. After what Harry had told me, I could not help watching both him and Henry. I saw no change in my nephew. He was a good-hearted, honest young man, but he was not impulsive, and his imperturbable fair face told me nothing. About a fortnight after Harry had spoken to me, he came again to my room. He stood for awhile by the fireplace, gazing down at the blazing coals ; then, suddenly looking up, with his rich brown eyes full upon mine, he said,

“ ‘ Auntie, my trouble is getting very heavy.’ “ But I did not ask him what that trouble was. Since he was silent, it was that he could not speak. I sometimes fancied that Henry and he liked the same girl, and that my Harry had lost the day, and Henry had won it. And yet how could this be ? Save that one was rich and the other poor, there could be no comparison between the two cousins. Henry was handsome and good-natured, but cold and inert ; and my Harry had the fervour, the passion, the chivalrous turn which can best charm a woman’s heart, be she young or old. It would indeed be

a marvel of marvels if he had failed, and Henry had succeeded. However this might be, I would have given anything to know who the girl was, but I never had the least clue. I concluded, and I believe with truth, that I had never seen her; but how and where had they met her? It was very strange and perplexing. Stranger still it would have seemed to one who did not know them as I did, that this rivalry, if it existed, should produce no change in their friendship; but to me that was the simplest thing of all.

"A few weeks had gone by, when Mr. de Lu-signan came to my sitting-room one morning. His face was white, and without saying a word he put an open letter in my hand. It was a note, unsigned, in a woman's handwriting, and it ran thus :

"' Tell him that he must come and see her to-day, but that he must by no means repeat to her what I said to you last night.'

"These were the exact words. I have not forgotten one of them. I daresay they meant very little, and were not worth remembering;

but they ruined my boy's prospects, and cost him his life. Little wonder is it that they remained on my mind for ever.

" 'This note is dated Wednesday, as you see,' said Mr. de Lusignan, 'and the post-mark on the envelope proves that it was received by Harry, to whom it was directed, at a post-office in the City on Thursday last. The last night alluded to in the note is therefore last Tuesday evening. That evening Henry spent at home with us, and Harry was out till twelve. He had been to see Professor Clarke, he told us the next day. It is very plain to me, and I dare say as plain to you, that Harry saw some one besides the Professor on that evening. It is plain to me that he is some one's messenger or go-between in a matter concerning some woman or other. Do you suspect or not that some one to be my son ?'

" I could not answer him one word.

" 'I see you do,' he continued, taking back the letter. ' Well, I am fond of Harry, but let him look to himself. I have not forgotten Fontainebleau. Let him look to himself.'

“With that he left me. I feared the worst, and the worst came. I wonder why I tell you all this, Mignonne? It is a sad story at the best. But you will find through life that people will come to you with their troubles, past or present. You have a wistful, listening face, that promises sympathy and invites confidence.

“Well, it is useless to linger over all this. Harry, on being taxed with the note which his uncle had found in the hall, denied nothing and confessed nothing, beyond the fact that this note was addressed to him, and not to his cousin. I was not present, but I can imagine how he bore himself, silent, obstinate, and respectful. Henry, on being questioned, flatly denied all connection with the writer of the note, and declared he could not imagine what all this meant. His father did not believe him, nor did I; and the end of it all was that Harry was banished—sent adrift on the world with a hundred pounds in his pocket, and forbidden all intercourse with Henry. To ensure obedience, Mr. de Lusignan took us both to Germany.

“For six weary months I did not see my

Harry. He wrote to me every week. He was doing well; he was a good chemist, and a large firm had secured his services at a fair salary. He had been reared expensively; but his tastes were simple, and he seemed satisfied with his lot. Of his uncle and Henry he never spoke.

“Matters were not going on well between father and son all this time. Harry, though Mr. de Lusignan never suspected it, had kept Henry’s temper under, and made him amenable to authority; he was the one strong link between these two, and when he was gone they snapped asunder. Their life now became one perpetual jar, and one day when I was out they had a serious difference, of which I always suspected Harry to have been the innocent cause. I noticed how sulky and defiant Henry looked that evening. The next morning we missed him; he was gone, leaving a note for me, in which he simply said that he could bear this life no longer. This was the final parting between Mr. de Lusignan and the son whom he had cherished so fondly.”

"Did they never meet again, Mademoiselle?" I asked.

"Never," she sadly answered. "The next news we had of Henry was that he had gone to America. We returned to England at once. My first act was to see Harry. He could, or he would tell me nothing of his cousin. Yet to his door Mr. de Lusignan laid all the blame of his son's flight. 'He has been my boy's ruin throughout,' he said bitterly; and from that conviction nothing I said could ever move him. A month after our return, Mr. de Lusignan said to me, 'Henry is married.' I had feared as much all along, but I was greatly startled, and wishing to doubt, asked him how he knew it. 'I will tell you all about it later,' he answered. He never did, for the end came, and the subject was not broached again between us till last night. Henry soon came to grief in New York, and wrote to tell me his troubles, but said nothing of being married. I spoke to his father. 'Let him come back,' he said; and Henry, who had got rather tired of his liberty, consented to return. But as if father and son

never could agree, the boat he was to come by became a subject of contention between them. Mr. de Lusignan insisted that his son should return on board the *Phœnix*, the captain of which was one of his oldest friends; and Henry so resented the idea of being placed under a sort of guardianship, that he wrote to me. ‘I will rather not return than come back on board the *Phœnix*.’ His father was obstinate, however, and he had to yield.

“The *Phœnix* was on her way home, when I got a note from Harry, asking me to call upon him. He had much to tell me, he said. I went to his rooms in Great Russell Street, and as I sat in the pleasant front parlour, looking out at the British Museum opposite, I little thought what that ‘much’ could be. Presently he came in, looking bright, cheerful, and rather flushed.

“‘Auntie,’ he said, laying his hand on my arm, and looking down in my face, ‘I am going away, and I could not go without bidding you good-bye.’

“My heart sank within me. ‘And where are you going?’ I asked. ‘Not to America, I hope.’

“‘ Oh ! no ; I am going with O’Donnell.’

“ Oh ! Mignonne, you cannot guess what that answer was to me. I daresay you have never heard of O’Donnell, and of his great exploring expedition in Australia. I knew very little about it then, but I knew enough to cry out in sudden anguish :

“‘ Oh ! Harry, Harry, why do you do this ?’

“ He did not answer me at once. When he spoke, he said :

“‘ Do you know that I have seen uncle ? No. Well, then, I have seen him often of late. It was he who sought me. Auntie, I have not, I never had any share in those portions of Henry’s conduct which may have displeased his father ; but I failed to convince him that such was the case. I owe to my uncle all I am, and it is hard that he, of all men, should reproach and suspect me. So hard did I find it that I said to him once, ‘ Shall I leave England, and thus convince you I am not leading Henry astray ? ’ He took me at my word ; and knowing my old bent, he suggested I should go out with O’Donnell. I consented. I daresay it is all pride,

auntie, but if uncle chooses that I should thus pay my debt to him, why should I grudge the cost? Only I do not think that all will be well between him and Henry when I am gone.'

"I looked at my darling with pining eyes. I seemed to know that I should never see him again.

"'Do you like to go?' I asked.

"'I like it!' he said, his eyes kindling. 'I have always liked it. Auntie, can you not understand that the struggle of man against savage nature, which is the wondrous attraction of 'Robinson Crusoe,' and has made it a book for all time, is also the spell of exploring adventure. It is something to see that old mother of ours through some other medium than that of tilled fields, however rich or fertile, or of forests planted by man, however grand and ancient! There must be wondrous music in the roar of nameless rivers flowing through pathless wastes. Every step on is a conquest; every step back may be death! And then to fall asleep by smouldering watch-fires, with the quiet stars above; and to dream of home, of cottages, of

ivy-clad churches, ruins, cities; and to waken and hear the howl of wild beasts, ravenous for, yet fearful of man. Auntie, it is a grand life!"

"‘And so you are glad to go?’ I said, with tears in my eyes.

“‘Even if I were not,’ he answered, ‘it would be too late to hang back.’

“After this, he spoke again of the expedition with ardour and enthusiasm. Still it seemed to me that something, which I could not define, ailed him.

“‘Harry, what is it?’ I asked. ‘There is something on your mind—what is it?’

“He looked at me very earnestly. His lips parted as if to speak, but he shook his head.

“‘Not now,’ he said, ‘later.’

“That ‘later’ never came. We were to meet again, but we did not. This was the last time that my eyes rested on my darling. We left town for a short time, but O’Donnell hastened the departure of the expedition, and my Harry was gone when we came back. He left a kind letter for me, but there was not a word in it

concerning that trouble which I had read in his face.

“ This was in Spring, and the *Phænix* was on her way home. We were in Hampstead again, and on a calm grey evening I sat in my room thinking of the dear boy with whom I had so often looked at that prospect of green foreground, and hazy mass of London below, when Mr. de Lusignan came in. I could not see his face well in the dim twilight, but it seemed to me that his step was very heavy.

“ ‘ Any news of the *Phænix*? ’ I asked, for I knew he had gone to town to inquire.

“ ‘ Yes,’ he answered, in a strange voice ; ‘ the *Phænix* was burned at sea three days back ! ’

“ How I heard him ; what he said after this ; how we both bore it, I cannot tell you now, Mignonne. I remember that evening as an awful blank, full of heart-sickening horror. For the news was cruelly true. We had not the relief of a moment’s doubt, of a second’s hope. The *Phænix* was burned at sea, and the two men of her crew who survived and brought the tidings, both saw my poor nephew leap desperately into

the sea to escape the raging fire behind him. They saw that sea close over his head, and heard his last despairing shriek. Yes! that was the end of my sister's child, and Mr. de Lusignan's son.

"I can talk of these things now, but Mr. de Lusignan cannot. I am nearer to death, and to the loved ones we have both lost, than he is, by some years. I am going down hill, and he is climbing still, or has scarcely ceased doing so. That journey, which, to him, still looks endless, seems a very short one to me. And yet—and yet, Mignonne," she ceased, and a great rush of tears clouded her blue eyes; but she soon shook them away, and said, in a low, calm voice, "I have not much more to say. When the first passion of sorrow has spent itself, there comes a dreary time, of which strangers say, 'that you are getting over it.' Getting over it!—well, let it be. We were both in that mood when the news of Harry's death came. I can speak of that too. He had joined O'Donnell, as I told you. That O'Donnell was a man of unmatched daring and unflinching

courage ; he robbed me of my darling, but he was a hero, if ever there was one. He neglected nothing to ensure the success of his expedition, and was powerfully aided. Money came in to him from every quarter. Mr. de Lusignan gave a large sum ; camels were brought from Asia as more likely to endure fatigue than horses, and when O'Donnell started, his little band consisted of picked men as brave as himself. But it was an awful undertaking. My heart sinks when I think of what these men went through. The very camels could not bear the fatigue ; little wonder is it if one after another the explorers died. They died after suffering all that men can suffer of hunger, sickness, and thirst. One by one they dropped off on the way home. Three who survived were met by another expedition that had been sent out to look for them ; but neither O'Donnell nor my Harry was amongst them. O'Donnell died of fever, and Henry was killed in an encounter with the natives. When I read this dreary story in the *Times* one morning, I thought I must have expired with grief—but I did not—I

did not, I am living still, though I shall never see my Harry again. All Mr. de Lusignan said, was—‘I made Henry return by the *Phænix*, and he was drowned. I made Harry go with O’Donnell, and he was killed!’ He did not add another word ; but, surely, never was self-condemnation more bitter than this !”

“ And now, Mignonne,” she added, rising, “ let us go home. You know why I am so familiar with this place. Some of my happiest days were spent in these gardens, in that forest. The wish to brave and conquer his gnawing sorrow has brought Mr. de Lusignan here, but to us both the place is haunted. Wherever we go, our boys are with us ; we see their laughing faces through the trees, we hear their gay young voices echoing among the rocks. It is a keen ordeal, but there is sweetness in it too ; and if it should be the means of discovering my poor nephew’s child, surely Providence itself must have led us by the hand. Well, you know my story. If there must be a romance in every woman’s life, you know mine—a boy’s love. The two children, who were once so dear to me,

had scarcely reached man's estate when they were taken from me. The sea keeps one, the sands of the Australian wastes hold the other—the last, the best, the dearest!—and I, who should have gone before, have been left to pray night and morning for their poor souls, and say, ‘God's will be done!’”

CHAPTER VIII.

I FELT like one in a dream, as we walked home through the sunny streets. This was the first bit of romance in real life that had come to me. It was tragic enough ; but youth is not afraid of sorrow, and Mademoiselle Aubrey's tale had a touch of mystery that charmed me.

When we passed through the open gate of the Fair Gabrielle—I did not care quite so much about it now—we found Mr. de Lusignan walking up and down in front of the house, and smoking a cigar.

“ Well !” said his sister-in-law, standing still before him. She spoke with evident emotion, and I felt my heart beating.

“ Well !” replied my guardian, throwing away the end of his cigar, and still walking up and down. “ Mrs. Smith is either some other Mrs.

Smith, or the most impenetrable of women. She has a maid called Watkins, a stolid, impassible, mulish kind of girl, with whom I had the honour of holding a five-minutes' conversation, whilst I was entertaining Master Smith by showing him my watch at the door of Ganne's. Mrs. Smith is a widow, and Mr. Smith"—he laid marked emphasis on the name—"died of consumption two years ago. So says, and evidently believes, Watkins. Whilst we were thus discoursing, Mrs. Smith came dressed for a walk. She took the child by the hand, and looked at me with her dark blue eyes—kind eyes they were, but not eyes that told you much. I introduced myself, and took the liberty of asking if Mrs. Smith was not related to a connexion of mine, Lusignan Smith. 'I never heard the name before,' she answered, with British coldness, and bowing with the most freezing politeness, she walked away. The child looked after me, but neither Mrs. Smith nor Watkins honoured me with a second glance."

All this Mr. de Lusignan said quite composedly, pausing now and then in his up and

down promenade, but otherwise showing very little interest in what he said. He was a keenly sensitive man, and, because he was so, he hated betraying his feelings. One thing I noticed, and it nettled that self-love which is so strong in the young—he never seemed, even in the faintest manner, to direct his discourse to me. I stood there hearing, because it would have been inconvenient to exclude me from the secret, but my importance as a listener was equal to that of the flag on which I stood.

“Well,” remarked Mademoiselle Aubrey, after a brief pause, “you were prepared for denial, were you not?”

“I was, and therefore got what I was prepared for. And yet,” he added, looking at his sister-in-law, with a sudden change of manner, “that woman is my son’s widow. Her countenance never moved, her look never flinched, her lip never quivered when I uttered his name, but she just clutched the child’s hand, and drew him more closely to her side, as I spoke; and, I say it again, she is my son’s widow, and her child is his child.”

“ What will you do now ? ”

“ I am not very sure what I shall begin by—I shall see.”

I believe he so far remembered me as not to care to say more about his intentions.

“ And if she should go away ? ” suggested Mademoiselle Aubrey. .

“ She will not. I am no physiognomist, or that woman loves danger for danger’s own sake. She is as intrepid as she is handsome, and, feeling perfectly secure, rather likes to brave me. Let her. If I have got truth on my side, as I believe I have, I shall prevail over her yet.”

He did not seem inclined to say more, and Mademoiselle Aubrey and I entered the house together. I was burning with curiosity and excitement.

“ Well,” I said breathlessly to my companion, as soon as we got out of earshot, “ what do you think, Mademoiselle ? ”

“ I think, as your guardian says, my dear, that Mrs. Smith is Henry’s widow ; but I also think it will be a hard task to detect such a

woman, if she is bent on concealment. How can Mr. de Lusignan get hold of her? I doubt if even English law gives him any power over her, and assuredly French law can have nothing to say between Mr. de Lusignan and a lady who denies all knowledge of him.

“Do you know, Mademoiselle,” I sagely remarked, pausing at the door of her room, which we had now reached, “that I think it must be all a mistake. Why should she hide from Mr. de Lusignan, and keep his little grandson from him, when he is quite a rich man, you know?”

I thought myself very worldly wise in making this prudential remark, but Mademoiselle Aubrey only smiled.

“My dear,” she said, “the motives which rule the conduct of men and women are not always strictly logical, and what is more, they do not always lie on the surface, so that he who runs may read. My poor nephew had good reason to hide his marriage, and call himself Lusignan Smith; and so may Louisa Jones have had reasons of her own for secrecy—rea-

sons which may still exist, though Henry is no more."

This new view of the subject bewildered me. I had heard of wards in Chancery. I had no exact idea of what a ward in Chancery was, but I believed that Chancery was a hard guardian to deal with, and, for all I knew, might punish its disobedient wards in some very harsh manner. I daresay I should have made some such suggestion to my companion, but she was tired, or did not care, perhaps, to discuss the matter on the staircase, for with a kind nod she entered her room, and left me to my conjectures concerning this second mystery. True, she had only hinted that it was probable; but I quickly jumped to the conclusion that it was certain. I now felt quite sure that Louisa Jones and Mrs. Smith were one; also that this double individual had a story which I longed to know all the more that I had not the faintest clue to it. I had but a vague, dull story of my own, and so I had plenty of time and thought to spare for the stories of other people. My mind was full of this particular one just then, and

because it was so, I took comparatively little interest in an incident which occurred whilst we were at dinner, and which, though it seemed to have no sort of relation to the matter uppermost in Mr. de Lusignan's mind (and in mine), was nevertheless destined to influence it in a very remarkable manner.

The dining-room was on the ground-floor. It was a very wide and rather bare room, with oak furniture and stiff-backed oak chairs. Our dinner was unusually late this evening, and we had lights before it was over; but the windows opposite which I sat remained open. When I got tired of looking at my guardian's mobile brown face, and of speculating as to what his thoughts might be about—I did not know then that when a man is a bit of an epicure, as my guardian assuredly was, his dinner is never forgotten, whatever other absorbing topics may be in his mind—when, as I said, I got tired of this, I looked through the window facing my chair. I saw the old gate in the grey twilight, now deepening into night, and beyond its iron bars I caught a glimpse of the silent, lonely

street. A postman was going by ; he stopped at a gate opposite ours, and I saw him take out his little lantern—gas-lamps in Fontainebleau are, like angel visits, few and far between—and flash its light on the letter he was going to deliver. Was he bringing one to me ?—from James Carr, of course. No, he passed on. James was not writing yet. When would he write ? I wondered. And so my thoughts were straying away from the present time and visible things, when a sound of wheels and jingling bells, which had been coming up the street, ceased abruptly, and the railway omnibus stopped at our gate. Neither of my two companions seemed to heed this; but my heart began to beat. I must have been crazy indeed, or the wild thought that James was coming could not have crossed my mind; but so it was, for a man alighted, a man with luggage, which the driver took down from the roof of the omnibus ; a man who, having paid his fare, rang the bell, which pealed loud and clear as the omnibus drove away.

“ What’s that ? ” said my guardian, sharply.

His back was to the window, and he had seen nothing; besides, he was very much engaged with a *canard au petits pois*, which was really very nice.

“It’s—it’s a gentleman coming here,” I faltered, still thinking of James.

“What!”

“He has come with luggage,” I resumed, feeling impelled by perverse fate to lay the full enormity of the case before him.

“With what?”

I did not answer. I had no need to do so. A servant had answered the bell, and was ushering the stranger in.

“Prenez donc garde, Hermance,” said a French male voice, which was neither musical nor young. “Là, bien—c’est ça.”

I am afraid I breathed a relieved sigh on finding out that it was not James after all. Hermance and the stranger, a short, stout man, who breathed heavily, were entering the house together. The girl carried a small valise; our unknown visitor bore a camp-stool, an easel, and a painting-box, all strapped together. My

sight, which was keen, enabled me to distinguish these particulars; but Mr. de Lusignan, who was short-sighted, vainly peered into the darkness—he could make out nothing.

“Is there really some one coming here?” asked Mademoiselle Aubrey, in an amazed tone.

“It would seem so,” coolly answered my guardian; and he rang the bell.

Hermance herself answered it, after a little delay.

“Who is the gentleman that has just come?” asked my guardian, speaking with a composure that surprised me.

“Oh! that is Monsieur Renaud,” answered the girl, with a half smile at the question.

“I am sorry to say, my good girl, that your answer leaves my mind in the dark. Who is Monsieur Renaud?”

“He is Baron Regnier’s friend.”

“And Baron Regnier is the owner of this house. But, you see, Baron Regnier having let this house to me, and not being in it himself at the present time, I cannot see why Monsieur Renaud should come to it.”

I could see from the face of Hermance that my guardian's bantering manner puzzled her extremely. However, she had a good fund of French coolness of her own, for she answered composedly,

"Monsieur Renaud is very fond of Fontainebleau."

"Is he? How good of him! I suppose he is fond of this house too?"

"Oh! yes; he always comes here," replied Hermance, still very cool. "He has come here for the last ten years."

"In—deed! Well, I am sorry to disappoint Monsieur Renaud in the eleventh year of his reign, but here he cannot come for this one year. I have taken this house, and I mean to use it all myself."

Hermance looked bewildered.

"There are so many bedrooms in it," she said, remonstratively.

"Very true; but I am like the ancient tyrant, I mean to sleep in every one in turns; and I shall sleep this night in the very one to which you have shown Monsieur Renaud. Please to

go and tell him so. With my compliments, of course ; for I beg you to be perfectly civil to Monsieur Renaud."

Spite this admonition, Hermance looked very reluctant to deliver my guardian's message ; but as he kept his eye upon her, evidently expecting her to go, she went. Her step up the stairs, however, was hesitating and slow. She soon came back to us, and as she stood before Mr. de Lusignan, who leaned back in his chair, looking at her, I noticed a spark of mischief in Hermance's black eyes. Without giving her time to speak, Mr. de Lusignan said :

" Well, is Monsieur Renaud gone ? "

Hermance looked very demure.

No, Monsieur, Renaud was not gone.

" But is going," significantly said Mr. de Lusignan.

I fancied that he was beginning to lose his temper. Hermance shook her head. No, Monsieur Renaud was not going.

" Perhaps you will tell me exactly what he said ? " This was spoken very curtly.

With the delightful alacrity which some peo-

ple feel when it is their pleasant task to utter disagreeable truths, Hermance glibly replied—

“Oh! Monsieur Renaud laughed a little on receiving Monsieur’s message, and said Monsieur was an Anglais and an original.”

“Did he? And pray, what else did he say?”

My guardian looked very ominous now, but Hermance seemed neither frightened nor disconcerted, as she said—

“He asked if Monsieur would be so good as to look at his agreement.”

“My agreement, or rather my lease, of this house, has nothing to do with Monsieur Renaud,” sharply answered Mr. de Lusignan. Nevertheless, he opened his pocket-book, and began looking among its contents. He soon found the paper he was searching for, and, drawing the lamp towards him, read it attentively.

I saw, as he read, his thick dark eyebrows uplifted in puzzled surprise; then he burst out laughing, and tossed the paper on the table.

“Well?” said Mademoiselle Aubrey.

“Well, I find, by this lease, that I did give

Baron Regnier the right to keep a certain attic on the second floor, which, in my wisdom, and knowing that the said Baron was in Italy, I concluded must be to hold trunks and other lumber. Well, well, even old travellers commit mistakes. How old is Monsieur Renaud?" he added, addressing Hermance.

"Oh! sixty, at the very least," she promptly answered.

"Venerable! All right. Go, therefore, to Monsieur Renaud, my good girl, and tell him that I committed a mistake, and beg a thousand pardons!"

I fancy that, when she delivered this message, Hermance kindly added to it the question concerning Monsieur Renaud's age which my guardian had put to her. Mr. de Lusignan was sipping his coffee in the drawing-room an hour later, when Monsieur Renaud sent in a civil message. "He asked to have the honour of speaking to Monsieur."

"Tell Monsieur Renaud I shall be most happy," was the affable reply, and presently Monsieur Renaud made his appearance.

He was a short, broad man, with flowing white hair, clear blue eyes, and an open countenance, which it did one good to look at. I liked him much, and I saw that he produced a most favourable impression on my two companions.

“Monsieur,” said he, addressing my guardian with that easy French politeness of which the true charm is that it is neither stiff nor oppressive, “I come to apologize for my unconscious intrusion on your privacy. But, as you see, Monsieur, I am an old man and quite harmless, I assure you. I have only one hobby, painting, which takes me out of doors. I go out with the sunrise, live in the forest, and, as I cannot stay more than ten days, I really think, this house being so large a one, that we need never meet.”

“In that case, I should assuredly be a loser,” graciously said my guardian.

Monsieur Renaud bowed, and was rising to go, but Mr. de Lusignan detained him. Perhaps he was not sorry, harmless though Monsieur Renaud described himself to be, to know

more about him. So far as I could see, he found out nothing. Monsieur Renaud looked the most open of men, he had the frankest laugh, the clearest eye, but of himself, or rather of his position, business, and doings out of Fontainebleau, he said not one word. Mr. de Lusignan looked puzzled when he left us at the end of an hour.

“ He has not the *employé* type upon him,” he remarked, musingly, “ nor yet the *rentier* type, and certainly not the careless rich man’s type. What is he ?”

I seldom answered any remark my guardian made, so I kept to myself any stray fancies I might have concerning Monsieur Renaud. I did not care much about him, to say the truth. I was taken up with Mrs. Smith, little suspecting that, between the unknown beauty at Barbison and this elderly Frenchman with the flowing white hair, a secret link, of which neither knew, was being even then woven by the hands of Fate. Still, to say something, I suppose, I remarked, addressing Mademoiselle Aubrey, who had listened to and looked at our visitor with

shrewd attention, “What do you think Monsieur Renaud is, Mademoiselle ?”

“I think, my dear, that he does not wish to say it, and that it matters very little to us,” she replied, pleasantly, but so plainly that I felt reproved ; for, though she was the best of women, she had been a governess, and could not help lecturing.

CHAPTER IX.

"WE shall walk to Mont Ussy to-day," said Mademoiselle Aubrey to me the next morning, "and you may bring your sketch-book, Mignonne."

This was delightful, and, to make it more delightful still, we were to go alone. I liked my guardian, after a certain fashion, but he had frightened the shy spirit of youth within me, and I always felt more at my ease when he was not by. So, after luncheon, we walked leisurely, Mademoiselle Aubrey and I, through the cool and green forest to Mont Ussy.

Oh! fair solitude of rock, and fern, and tree, shall I ever see you again, I wonder? And, if I do, shall I go into the raptures in which I went then? Nature has two sorts of lovers,

her familiars, who live in daily intercourse with her, who see her suns rise as well as her suns set, who behold her through drenching rains, who look at her withering before Autumn blasts, and lying cold and dead beneath shroud-like frost and snow. These love her with a close, keen, silent love, the love of bridegroom and bride; these are flesh of her flesh, and bone of her bone; they cannot live unless they breathe her air Summer and Winter, unless they see her daily, in every season, under every aspect. But that love, though so deep, is no extravagant fondness, which shows itself in speech, laughter, or tears. The other lovers of Nature know very little about her. They were born and bred in the city worlds of brick and mortar, and when they behold Nature face to face, grand, wild, and fair, their joy is no calm delight, but an almost painful rapture. They are very ignorant, they may not know an oak from a beech-tree, the song of the linnet from that of the thrush, but they have a keener sense of the beauty of Nature than if they had been nursed on her bosom, and clasped all day long to her heart.

I was one of these. I was sadly ignorant. A peasant girl would have laughed at some of my blunders, but I felt, to my heart's core, the loveliness of all I saw, from the commonest weed to the most stately tree. My enthusiasm, which could not, unfortunately, be silent, must have been either very wearisome or very amusing to my companion.

"Oh ! Mademoiselle, look at those rocks," I cried. "Look at the rich velvet of that moss creeping upon them. And then the deep dark red and orange of those huge stones. And those ferns, so tall, so green ! And that tree ! Oh ! Mademoiselle, there never was such a tree, surely !"

After crossing a rocky defile, we had reached an open space, enclosed by rocks of most varied shape and aspect. Here rose some noble trees, and pre-eminent amongst them was an oak, which, though shorn of its great height, and shattered by many a storm, was still conspicuous for its huge trunk and far-spreading boughs.

"Yes, it is a noble tree," she replied, her bright blue eyes lit with admiration—"it is the

Charlemagne, the oldest tree in all the forest.
Draw it, Mignonne."

"Oh! will you—will you really stay here
with me if I do?" I cried.

"Yes, Mignonne; I have got my love-story,
you know, and my work, should I get tired of
it."

Dear Mademoiselle! I wondered then why
you were so fond of love-tales—why there was
always one lying on your pillow at home, or
hidden in your pocket when we went out. It
seemed very strange to me then that a stout,
grey-haired lady of sixty should delight in the
drama of a passion which youth most inconsis-
tently vows to be eternal, and yet restricts to
its own green Spring season. I have lived to
grow wiser; I have lived to know that love,
whether granted or denied, is the story of
every heart. Wives and mothers care com-
paratively little for romances. Why should
they? Their own story, sad or joyful, is enough
for them; but maids, old or young, are not so
indifferent. These look back and think, "Thus
it might have been!" and these look forward,

and smile and think, “Thus it will be.” But that wisdom, such as it is, was hidden from me then, and I wondered at Mademoiselle Aubrey as she sat down on a mossy bank in the shade, and settling her spectacles on her nose, began to read.

I walked round the Charlemagne, and having weighed the important matter deeply, placed myself in what I considered the most favourable position, and began to draw. At first my task absorbed me, then, little by little, those subtle powers of nature which sooner or later master us when we enter her domain, drew my mind away, and made my pencil flag. A sort of awe crept over me. The day was gusty, the spot was very wild. Sitting thus midst savage rocks, with mighty trees growing from amongst them, and holding them fast with their claw-like roots, and spreading their mighty arms above them, as if to say, “We have conquered you, and you are ours,” and listening to the loud, strong wind above them—strong and loud as the coming of the tide by the seashore—the world felt very far away. I am, and

have always been, a coward, and I was going to ask Mademoiselle Aubrey whether we should not leave this lonely spot, when my guardian and Monsieur Renaud, stepping round some rocks, suddenly appeared before us.

No eagle ever pounced on harmless dove more swiftly than Monsieur Renaud pounced on my poor sketch-book. In a second he was at my back, looking over my shoulder.

"Allow me," he said.

Allow him! Oh! that I could have forbidden, and not allowed! I was so disconcerted that Mr. de Lusignan burst out laughing.

"Thank me, Mignonne," he said, mischievously. "I met Monsieur, and asked him to be so good as to come and look at your work. It will be of the greatest advantage to you to have Monsieur's criticism and advice."

He spoke in French, and Monsieur Renaud made a polite demur, but nevertheless criticized my Charlemagne very liberally. The trunk was too thick—that bough was too short—the foliage was heavy. "I should like to feel the breeze going through," said Monsieur

Renaud, with a graceful wave of his hand, which he no doubt intended for the breeze. "Yes, Mademoiselle, there is a want of air in your foliage."

I felt rather depressed by this want of air in my foliage, but knowing that, if I looked as I felt, I should look sulky, and wishing, on the contrary, to look sprightly and at ease, I thanked Monsieur Renaud for his good advice.

"I will show you my Charlemagne," he said, unfastening a huge portfolio which he carried strapped to his back, and opening it with great alacrity. "I did him last year sitting on that very same stone, Mademoiselle."

Revenge was said of old to be so sweet that the gods kept it for themselves as the choicest of morsels. There must be a dreadful truth in the saying, or I should never have been so glad as I was when I saw Monsieur Renaud's Charlemagne. Deluded man! Did he call these sticks boughs, and did he think to impose upon me these dots of blue sky, picked round with bits of green—did he think, I say, to impose them upon me as that glorious world of air which

surrounds us with a quivering sea of light? If my Charlemagne was bad, what was this? The thought brought back my good-humour, and I could look, with my guardian and Mademoiselle Aubrey, who had now joined us, at the contents of Monsieur Renaud's portfolio. Suddenly I gave a start, for the wind had brought down to me the prattling voice of a child from among the rocks above us, and another voice had called out in English "Harry!" Unconscious of the meaning these words had for us, Monsieur Renaud, half shutting his eyes, and holding out one of his sketches at arm's length, said complacently:

"That is a bit from the eagle's eyrie. There is vigour in these rocks, as you see."

"Ah! to be sure," I answered—"I see."

But never was confession of "seeing" more fallacious than mine. I saw nothing of the kind, for all the time I was looking up the path.

She came first, stepping down the rocks with the grace and dignity of a young nymph; she walked straight towards us, with downcast

eyes, which she suddenly raised as she had to pass by us. I did not see my guardian, but I felt that her look and his met at that moment. I was breathless with excitement, and I read her face, as far as a face of that still beauty—kept thus still, I felt, because she willed it so—could be read. A faint subtle change came over it, a sudden flash in the deep blue eyes, that died, as it had come, in a moment, a quivering motion of the dainty lips, something between scorn and defiance, that passed away even as I gazed.

“This way, Watkins,” she said, turning her graceful head back, “we shall sit down here.”

And she went and sat on the mossy bank which Mademoiselle Aubrey had forsaken. Ay, she sat there, with Mr. de Lusignan looking alternately at her and at the child, who now came, borne in the arms of the stolid Watkins, over whose shoulder he stared at us with solemn black eyes. If there was danger in Mr. de Lusignan’s presence, this woman braved it; if he was her enemy, she scorned to fly from him.

I could not help looking at my guardian ; and unconscious of my observation, he too let me read his swarthy face. He felt braved and defied ; every one of his features quivered with passionate emotion ; his mobile lips twitched nervously ; his dark eyes burned with resentment, and yet with a strange tenderness too. Mademoiselle Aubrey was pale but collected. I fancied that they avoided looking at each other. And all the time Monsieur Renaud, who was short-sighted, and to whom the beautiful Mrs. Smith and the plain Watkins were equally indifferent, went on displaying his sketches to my admiring gaze. Mrs. Smith, meanwhile, had taken out her work, and was hemming a cambric frill with perfect composure. Now and then she looked after Watkins, who had wandered away with the child, but it was plain, by the steadiness with which she wielded her needle and thread, that our vicinity was no objection to the lovely young widow.

Mr. de Lusignan could not emulate her coolness. He became flushed, then pale ; he took out a cigar, and threw it away ; he ruthlessly

destroyed with his stick a lovely group of young ferns growing in the rocks close by ; then after standing still two minutes, he took out his watch, turned to Mademoiselle Aubrey, and said,

"I find I shall be in time for the next train ; the station is close by, you know. Do not be surprised if I stay a few days away."

He bowed to Monsieur Renaud, but forgot my existence, and left us thus. Mrs. Smith and he were at war, and I do believe he had forgotten everything save that contest. He had spoken in English, but perhaps she had not heard him. She went on hemming, and did not even give him a look as he passed her by ; and yet it seemed to me as if she must know, as I knew, that this sudden departure concerned her. I was as sure of it as that I sat there listening to that prosy Monsieur Renaud, who could not weary of "foreground," and "aerial perspective," and "masses of foliage," that Mr. de Lusignan had only left us to deal this handsome and impenetrable Mrs. Smith a surer blow.

"And what do you think of this tree, Made-

moiselle?" asked Monsieur Renaud, holding up one of his sketches for my examination.

I was at the age when one would as soon think of expiring on the spot as of uttering disagreeable truths, so Heaven only knows how I should have got out of this dilemma, for I did not like Monsieur Renaud's tree at all, when a cough behind made us both turn round. Watkins, who had been wandering among the rocks, stood close to us, looking at Monsieur Renaud's drawing with the stupid, stolid look of a pair of full blue eyes. The boy was in her arms; his black eyes were heavy and dull, and his pale cheek lay on the girl's shoulder. Monsieur Renaud looked at the child, and I was struck with the altered meaning of his face as he looked. It was shrewd and observant, not anxious, by any means; but so keenly attentive that even the stolid Watkins opened her eyes and her mouth.

"Does that child belong to the lady who is sitting there beyond?" he asked.

But French was not among the accomplishments of Watkins, who only went on staring at

him. Monsieur Renaud put down his portfolio, and walked straight up to Mrs. Smith. He accosted her with stately and old-fashioned courtesy, standing bare-headed before her as he spoke.

“Madame,” he said, “you are, I presume, the mother of that little fellow in the *bonne’s* arms?”

Mrs. Smith put down her hemming leisurely, and looking up at him with mistrustful surprise, she slowly answered in French :

“Yes, sir, I am.”

“Then I hope that you have got a carriage waiting for you, for you must take that child away *at once*.” He laid marked emphasis on the words. “If you know of no doctor in Fontainebleau, send for Docteur Gesson, Rue de la Cloche. But, stop, he might be out; and you have not a moment to lose.” He took out his pocket-book, wrote something on a page which he tore out, and handed it to her. “Do this *at once*,” he said; “and then see Docteur Gesson.”

Mrs. Smith had heard him like one petrified. But as he put the paper into her hand, she start-

ed to her feet, and looked at Monsieur Renaud with scared eyes.

“Do you mean to say that my child is ill?” she asked, with a sort of anger in her pale, rigid face. “How dare you say it? Who are you?—who are you?”

“I am Docteur Renaud,” he replied, gravely, uttering a name of European fame; “and I am sorry to say that your child has got the croup.”

She uttered a cry, a low, sharp, wailing cry; then, swift as thought, she darted down the path, and snatching the child from the arms of Watkins, she vanished with it among the rocks, followed, after a pause of amazement, by the bewildered nurse. Her departure was so sudden that it took us all by surprise. Monsieur, or, rather, Docteur Renaud, looked after her, then shook his head, and came back to us. He was quite composed, and I do believe he was going to show me his tree again, but Mademoiselle Aubrey went up to him, laid her hand on his arm, and said impetuously,

“You are Docteur Renaud, the great child’s doctor. Oh! why do you not follow that

child, and try to save it? Go, you can still overtake them. Go, be quick!"

Her blue eyes flashed, and her lips quivered; for, though reason and will kept her calm, she was of a quick and vehement temper. Docteur Renaud looked bewildered for a moment, but recovering his composure, he said, rather shortly,

"Excuse me, Madame, but I am not here professionally. Of course, if I can help to save a child's life by timely warning, I do it; but it is Docteur Gesson's business to cure the sick of Fontainebleau, not mine."

As he said this, Docteur Renaud tied up the strings of his portfolio with rather a lofty air. Mademoiselle Aubrey had grown calm again.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I was too hasty; but that poor child's little face made me forget myself. Do you—do you think it can be saved?" she asked.

But Docteur Renaud would not commit himself. He raised his eyebrows, he pursed his lips. It was a very fatal disease, he confessed, but, if a good many children died of it, plenty were cured; and he had detained us long enough,

and he had the honour to wish us both, Madame and Mademoiselle, a good afternoon. With a very formal bow he left us.

“I was wrong—I frightened him,” said Mademoiselle Aubrey, looking after him. “I ought to have known better. But, oh! why was he so hard?” she added, with a rush of tears. “Why could he do nothing for poor Henry’s child? For it is Henry’s child, I am sure of it, Mignonne—sure, sure! And yet it may die—it may die!”

She was once more quite agitated.

“And I, who thought that Monsieur Renaud so good-natured,” I cried, in hot indignation. “Why, he must be a monster, Mademoiselle—quite a monster. And he draws so badly, too. His trees are shocking. And to behave so! Why, it is as bad as murder!”

But it was not in Mademoiselle Aubrey’s nature to be long partial or unjust. She sighed, and corrected herself again.

“I am too hasty—too hasty,” she said. “Think of it, Mignonne, that poor man is worked hard from morning till night. There

are no Sundays, no holidays for him ; and he comes here for ten days, just to take that rest without which, perhaps, he could not go on working and doing good. He warned the child's mother, but there his duty ends. He has laid down his burden for awhile; why do I grudge him that breathing time ?"

She was arguing with herself, because she was just, but in her heart she still felt half angry with Docteur Renaud, for she was mortal. I had no such scruples. I was quite wrathful, and said so. I was also too much disturbed to go on drawing, so we rose to leave. As we passed the bank on which Mrs. Smith had sat, I picked up the little frill she had been hemming, and showed it to Mademoiselle Aubrey.

" Poor thing !" she said, with a pitiful look—" poor thing !"

Our dinner was quiet, but in the evening Mademoiselle Aubrey, with an unselfishness which I was too inexperienced to appreciate, did her best to entertain me. Her mind was full of trouble and care, yet she seemed to put both by, in order that I might not feel dull. It is very

hard for sad thought to abide with youth, and though I had pronounced poor Docteur Renaud a monster, I came to the conclusion, on seeing Mademoiselle Aubrey so easy in her mind, as I fancied, that the child was not so very ill, after all, and that, somehow or other, he would be sure not to die. So, whilst Mademoiselle Aubrey was pacing her room up and down that night in a fever of anxiety, I laid my head on my pillow, and fell fast asleep.

But even the sound dreamless sleep of eighteen, which is so sweet and so deep, could not resist that pealing of our great bell—it was more like a church-bell than like anything else, deep, full, and sonorous—which, towards midnight, startled all our quiet household. The clamour awoke a watch-dog, whose furious barking would have roused the dead in their graves. I jumped up in sudden terror, and slipping on my dressing-gown, I opened my window, and looked out. The night was dark and sultry, a starless stormy night. The window next mine was thrown open, and Mademoiselle Aubrey's voice asked, in a loud tone, who was there.

"Perhaps it is Mr. de Lusignan," I suggested, from my window.

The gate had not been opened yet, though a light was now moving in the window at the lodge, and the bell rang again so violently that a third window opened above us, and Docteur Renaud's voice asked sharply,

"Is it fire? Because, if it is fire, just say so, and I shall dress, and if it is not I shall go back to bed."

No one answered this most reasonable question; but I heard Mademoiselle Aubrey open her door and go downstairs. A sudden terror of I knew not what seized me, and, without heeding poor Docteur Renaud, who, after waiting a while, was saying, very testily, "Well, is it fire, or is it not?" I ran out after her.

"Oh, Mademoiselle, do not leave me!" I cried—"Mademoiselle!" And, breathless with haste and fear, I flew down the stairs, and overtook her in the hall, just as the clamorous visitor, who had begun ringing a third time, was admitted by the gardener, after a brief parley.

"Do not be afraid, Mignonne," kindly said Mademoiselle, as I took her hand in the darkness, and clung tremblingly to her ; "I daresay it is your guardian."

But it was not. The gardener came towards us holding a lantern ; in its light I saw the pale face of Mrs. Smith, with the dazzling rays flashing around it on a background of darkness, as one sees the Virgin in old pictures of the Holy Family in Bethlehem. But this was no joyful mother showing her babe to worshipping kings and shepherds, whilst the soft shadow of angel wings broods over all. A face so woeful, so deathlike, as the one before me, I never yet had seen. She came straight up to us.

"I want to see that doctor," she said, in a voice which, though brief and clear, was very sweet and low, "now—this moment—I shall not leave the house till I have seen him."

"Come in," answered Mademoiselle Aubrey, holding out her hand to help her up the step ; and, as she did so, I saw that Mrs. Smith carried something in her arms wrapped up in a shawl.

Mademoiselle Aubrey took the lantern from the gardener's hand, and entered the dining-room ; Mrs. Smith followed ; I went after them both, and left the door ajar. There was a sound of slippered feet on the stairs, and whilst Mademoiselle Aubrey was lighting the candle in one of the tall silver flambeaux which figured daily on our table, the voice of Doctor Renaud spoke testily in the hall.

" Will anyone be so good as to tell me whether it is fire or not ? "

" Oh no, it is not fire," answered the pert voice of Hermance—for the universal clamour had roused her too, " the gardener says it is a lady from Paris who wants Monsieur."

" From Paris ! Here, take my nightcap, my good girl."

And, pushing the door open, Doctor Renaud entered the dining-room, flat candlestick in hand, and looking very like a benevolent Mandarin in his huge flowered dressing-gown. He did not recognize Mrs. Smith, but stared doubtfully at her, bowing with a perplexed air. She went up to him, and, opening her shawl,

held forth to him the child, who lay resting on her arms, breathing hoarsely.

"He is dying," she said, piteously—"dying, but you can save him, and you shall!"

Doctor Renaud frowned.

"Have you seen Doctor Gesson?" he asked, without giving the child a look.

"I have, and he is powerless. I have followed your prescriptions, and you see him—he is dying."

"There is nothing else to be done," said Doctor Renaud—"nothing, Madame."

"There is. There is an operation which saves some children; why should it not save my child? Doctor Gesson will not attempt it; he says it is no use—no use. That is why I have brought him. I knew you would not come to me; but now that I have brought him, you cannot—man! you dare not deny me!"

Her voice, though still so sweet, was so imperious, that Docteur Renaud looked up at her in momentary amazement; but the look passed away in a second, and, putting down his light, he examined the little fellow with the closest

and keenest attention. When he spoke, a length, we all hung on the words that fell from his lips—they were fatal and decisive.

“Doctor Gesson is right; an operation would be cruel and useless.”

“Cruel!” she repeated, with a quivering of the lip that was most pitiful—“cruel! Oh that is hard, but can he live without it?”

He was silent.

Her voice rang out clear and despairing.

“I ask if you, if Doctor Gesson, if anyone can save my child without that operation?”

Thus adjured, he answered—

“God can; man cannot.”

“But what man can do, man shall do,” she cried. “I know the operation is but the thousandth of a chance for him, but that chance my boy shall have. You, Doctor Renaud, shall perform that operation before I leave this house.”

“That I will not,” he most positively answered; “I will never inflict useless pain—on child, especially.”

She did not argue, but, putting the child i

Mademoiselle Aubrey's arms, she went to the door, and, laying her back against it, she said, with a dreadful calmness that froze the blood in my veins—

"I tell you, sir, that you shall not leave this room till you have either killed or saved my child."

A dead silence fell upon us. Never shall I forget that face of tragic beauty and despair. Docteur Renaud looked at her. Accustomed as he must have been to such scenes, he was deeply moved.

"Be it so," he said, "but, remember——"

"Hush!" she interrupted, with a shudder, "I can bear it, if it must be borne, but I cannot hear it spoken—I cannot!"

"Madame," said Doctor Renaud, addressing Mademoiselle Aubrey, "will you kindly be present, for I will have neither of those two ladies," he added, looking at Mrs. Smith and me.

I would not have been present for much, for, though I did not know what tracheotomy was, I felt sure that an operation must always be

something dreadful; but though I was glad to be excluded, I thought that Mrs. Smith would resist—she did not. All her energy had spent itself in gaining her point; now that it was won, she was weakly submissive. She went up to the child lying in Mademoiselle Aubrey's arms, kissed it, and walked out into the dark night. I hurried out after her.

“Will you come up to my room?” I whispered.

“Thank you,” she answered, in a low tone—it seemed as if we both feared to speak aloud, “a room would stifle me.”

The night was oppressively hot. We walked up and down in front of the house, not exchanging one word, with nothing but the sound of the gravel crunching beneath our feet to break on the solemn stillness. The lights had vanished from the dining-room, and the house was black again. Presently a man left it, and passing quickly by us, went out into the street. Mrs. Smith stood still listening to his hurried steps.

“It is the gardener,” I said.

"He is gone for Doctor Gesson," she replied, and again we walked up and down.

Her conjecture was correct. After a while the little side-door creaked on its hinges, and two men came in. We saw them from where we stood, but they did not see us. They entered the house, the door closed upon them, and all was still again; not a ray, not a sound, came from the dark house; the very garden trees were silent and fast asleep. Now and then a faint breeze rustled through their drowsy leaves, as if they were dreaming. Do trees sleep or dream of something better and kinder than what man and nature have granted to them? For surely there is a deeper life than we can ever fathom in all that fresh green growth with which earth is covered. That life, however, so mysterious, so far from us, never breaks on our solitude in hours of sorrow. It seemed to me then as if these dark trees added to the gloom and sadness of the black night. My heart sank within me; the minutes went by slow as hours. Never, surely, had the steps of Time been so heavy or so leaden as on that

night. "Oh! if it could be all over!" I thought in my weariness. And it was all over at length. The door of the house opened, and Mademoiselle Aubrey appeared on the threshold with a light in her hand.

"You can come to him now," she said, as we went up to her. "I have put him in the room next to mine; and though Mr. de Lusignan is not here, I can safely say that he would make you as welcome as I do."

In her loyalty I felt that my dear friend would tell Mrs. Smith whose guest she was. Did she not know it, or had she forgotten it in the passion of her fear, that as she looked up there came to her face of death-like paleness that look of vague, remote amazement?

CHAPTER X.

IT was all over. The terror and the suspense had gone by, and the joy remained in all its happy surprise. The boy was saved, and Doctor Renaud frankly said to his mother,

“Your faith has done it.”

They were still with us, for the child could not be removed, and Mrs. Smith had willingly accepted the hospitality which Mademoiselle Aubrey kindly pressed upon her. Mr. de Lusignan, little suspecting who was his guest, was still away, and we did not so much as know his whereabouts. Watkins even came to assist her mistress, whose temporary abode at the “Aigle Noir” was given up. For several days I saw little or nothing of our guest. Her whole time was devoted to her sick child, and she declined every assistance save such as Watkins

could give her. In the beginning Mademoiselle Aubrey and I had volunteered to help her in nursing the little patient ; but she thanked us a little coldly, I thought, and declined so positively that we did not renew our offer. I was rather affronted, but Mademoiselle Aubrey, ever indulgent, only said,

“ A mother—a jealous mother, Mignonne. Well, I am not sure that I would have allowed anyone to help me in nursing my boy.”

Whilst a shadow of danger hung over the child his mother did not leave him, even for one moment, to breathe a little fresh air in the garden ; but no sooner did she feel sure of his safety than she changed completely. I was standing alone in the dining-room, pondering over the news which Doctor Renaud had just imparted to us, and wondering whether Mr. de Lusignan would return before Mrs. Smith had left us, when I heard a light step on the staircase. I looked, for the dining-room door was half open, and saw Mrs. Smith coming down. She looked pale and worn, but was fully dressed for going out.

"Is it anything you want for the child?" I asked eagerly, going out to meet her. "Shall I go and get it for you? You would rather stay with him, I know, and you may trust me. It is I who get all his medicines from the chemist's."

This was the exact truth; for Mademoiselle Aubrey had been suffering from a bad cold, and had sent me, under the safeguard of Hermance, to the chemist in the Grande Rue, where the medicines ordered by Doctor Renaud were all prepared.

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Smith, with a pleasant smile. "I am so much obliged to you for all your kindness; but my darling wants no more medicine, I trust."

"Then shall I go and stay with him whilst you are out?" I volunteered, in that foolish, eager zeal which is so tiresome, but yet so pretty an attribute of inexperience and youth.

"Oh! dear, no!" she laughed. "He is as cross as two sticks, and I should be *so* sorry for you to have to bear his temper. Watkins is used to it."

I had no more to say, and though her manner

was pleasant, I felt rebuffed. Perhaps she saw this, for she added :

"I am going to Fontainebleau on a little bit of business. It is almost a shame to ask you to come with me, but I should like it so much, if you could spare the time; for, to tell you the truth, I feel very strange here."

I learned later that this was a polite fiction; for, apart from the fact that Mrs. Smith was not one ever to feel strange anywhere, she knew more of Fontainebleau than I did; but if she meant to please me by her request, she fully succeeded. I was ready in a few minutes, and forth we went, going down the shady side of the Rue Royale. When we reached the Grande Rue, Mrs. Smith looked about her, singled out a silk-mercier's shop, and for the first time enlightened me as to the business which had brought her out.

"I saw a very pretty Chantilly *fichu* here the other day," she said, "and I thought it would be the very thing to wear in hot weather. I hope they have got it still."

We entered the shop, and Mrs. Smith ex-

plained her errand to the very civil young man who came up to us. She spoke in good French, politely, but with just a touch of cool *hauteur* in her manner. She might be young, beautiful, and alone in the world, but Mrs. Smith evidently knew how to keep people at a distance without either rudeness or effort.

It took some time to find the *fichu*; and, when it came, Mrs. Smith looked at it with evident disappointment.

"What a horror it is!" she said to me in English. "I thought it lovely the other day."

She tossed it contemptuously on one side, and looked at other *fichus*, every one of which she pronounced vastly superior to her first choice. One especially quite fascinated her, and she had all but chosen it, when a smart young lady came out from some inner part of the establishment, and exclaimed, in a tone of righteous horror :

"Monsieur Victor, what are you doing? Why, this is the *fichu* which we are to send home to Madame la Sous-Préfète, as soon as the corner has been altered."

So saying, she took the first rejected *fichu*

and walked away with it. Mrs. Smith's back was turned to the smart young lady, and she could not see, though she could hear what passed. She continued turning over the little heap of lace on the counter for a few minutes, then she said,

“Where is the first I saw?”

She looked for it, whilst Monsieur Victor explained that the *fichu* being required by Madame la Sous-Préfète, could not be disposed of to Madame.

“Can you get one like it?” asked Mrs. Smith.

“Oh! certainly; to-morrow—or after to-morrow, at the latest.”

“Then let me see it again, if you please.”

The *fichu* was again brought up for inspection. Mrs. Smith scarcely gave it a look.

“I shall keep that one,” she said, coolly; “and since Madame la Sous-Préfète's requires to be altered, you may give her the one that comes from Paris.”

Monsieur Victor looked blank, but before he could utter a word the smart young lady, who had looked on with the uneasy watchfulness of

a hen whose chickens are threatened, uttered a shrill protest of alarm.

“Oh! but that was quite impossible. Madame la Sous-Préfète required that *fichu* particularly, and the corner was to be altered.”

“And you need not alter it if I take it,” interrupted Mrs. Smith.

“We will get you one like it,” suggested Monsieur Victor, “to-morrow.”

“I want it to-night.”

“Madame la Sous-Préfète must have her *fichu*,” persisted the smart young lady.

Mrs. Smith turned round. At the other end of the shop she spied out the master of the establishment, a mild, bald man, in gold spectacles. She went up to him with the *fichu* in her hand, and said, with the most seductive of smiles :

“I am sure, Monsieur, you will let me have that *fichu*. I chose it some days back, but my child was so ill that I could not see about it, and now I want it particularly. I really cannot do without it in this heat.”

Again the smart young lady protested, and

Monsieur Victor interfered. The master looked puzzled, and Mrs. Smith, still smiling and looking lovely, took up her theme without warmth or hurry, but seeming to consider resistance out of the question. And so it proved to be. In vain the name of the Sous-Préfète was invoked as a spell; what chance has Rinaldo when Armida chooses to set forth her wiles? Before five minutes were over, the Sous-Préfète had been defeated, and the *fichu* was Mrs. Smith's property.

"It is very pretty," I said, in order to say something, as we walked home together.

"Do you think so?" she replied, carelessly. "I think it hideous."

I must have looked very much puzzled, for she laughed merrily, and her blue eyes beamed saucy and mischievous from under the shadow of her little hat.

"Why, don't you see that I only took it in order that the Sous-Préfète might not have it?" she said, quite frankly. Of course I knew as much, but her sincerity put me into a state of great confusion. "You were a quaint and for-

mal little thing in those days," she said to me later, "a great deal too good for me, I fancied, but I learned to know better, Bessie."

This little incident of the *fichu* ended that evening in a most unexpected fashion. Mrs. Smith took her purchase up to her room, and Watkins having imprudently placed it and a pair of scissors in the vicinity of Master Harry's bed, the dainty lace was so clipped and hacked before half an hour was over, that Madame la Sous-Préfète was fully avenged. It was Hermance who told me this. Mrs. Smith said nothing about it; not that she would have cared, in the least, that I should know what had happened, but because it was her habit to be silent on all that concerned herself. Indeed, her reserve and reticence were remarkable in one so young. For whatever she was, she seemed to be without effort. I now began to see something of her, and, though she was very little older than I was, I soon learned by twenty little things that Mrs. Smith was as much beyond me in decision and will as I was beyond her in intellectual cultivation.



Her education had evidently been of a superficial kind, and her mental gifts neglected. She had no great brilliancy of imagination, no remarkable depth of thought, but she had much quickness of perception, and thorough originality of speech and manner, and an intrepidity which, being united to sensitiveness and all sorts of little fastidious, refined ways, always left her a woman. To crown all, she had a fine, generous, ardent heart, and the most variable of tempers. She was a brave, fickle creature—one of the born charmers who rule this world.

Of course there were spots on the sun; witness the Sous-Préfète's *fichu*. There was also, in Mrs. Smith, a certain hardness, which came out now and then, and gave me some unpleasant rebuffs; yet, do what I would, I succumbed to her. She might or might not be Mr. de Lusignan's daughter-in-law, the widow of his lost son, my interest in her had nothing to do with the mystery of her story. I cared for her for her own sake, and even though I felt intuitively that she would and must rule me. There

was no help for it. She was a woman on whom passion and sorrow had left their stamp, and I was still but half a child, far wiser than she was in book-lore, but knowing nothing of life, of the world, and, least of all, my own heart.

I do not know how it was that Mrs. Smith at once got hold of James Carr. She certainly did not question me; but, I suppose, I could not keep that back from her. She smiled, and looked a little dreamy as I told her my troubles; then she said, coolly,

“ You do not care for him, you know.”

Not care for James! I was breathless and indignant, and, of course, I vehemently protested that I did care very much for James.

“ Do you ?” she said, a little carelessly; and there the matter dropped. But Mrs. Smith’s words had left a sting behind them. I did not acquiesce in her verdict—of course not—but I felt uneasy and disturbed, and to drive some unpleasant thoughts away, I resolved to begin my drawing of the gate forthwith.

The beginning of most things are pleasant,

and so were mine, for I sat in a shady part of the street, quiet and alone, with Hermance knitting by my side. Ere long the sun came out; it was bright and hot, but an umbrella protected me from its scorching rays; there was nothing, however, to protect me against a troop of unruly and most ragged urchins, who buzzed about me like so many flies, irresistibly attracted by my colour-box, and by the prodigies of art which I was accomplishing under their very eyes.

“I really cannot work, Hermance,” I said, folding my hands in despair, after I had tried expostulation, and she had exhausted menaces, both in vain.

“Will Mademoiselle let me have her umbrella?” asked Hermance, in an eager whisper.

“Oh! do take it!” I readily entreated.

Hermance, shutting the umbrella, made a deceitful remark concerning the hour of our *déjeûner*, thereby lulling the enemy to sleep, and was stealthily preparing for action, when Mrs. Smith’s voice said behind us:

“What a pretty colouring you have, Miss

Carr!—the green above that old gate is so fresh and tender!"

"Do you draw?" I asked eagerly, for already a vision of going about drawing with the lovely Mrs. Smith had flashed across my mind.

"Oh, no!" she replied, uplifting her eyebrows, as if amazed at the suggestion.

"Would you not like it?" I asked.

She laughed lightly.

"I should not like the trouble," she said.

I had already found out that, save where her pleasure and her feelings were concerned, Mrs. Smith hated trouble, however fascinating might be the form it took.

"And can you really draw with those very dirty children about you?" she added, surveying the young natives of Fontainebleau with a look of unfeigned disgust, and a most expressive curl of her dainty lips.

"Hermance was going to drive them away with the umbrella when you came up," I said—"do you think she ought to do so?"

"By all means. It will be rare fun to see them scamper away."

We spoke in English, but she made a sign to Hernance, who, taking the hint with French quickness, charged the enemy with such vigour that a shameful rout followed. Mrs. Smith laughed gaily; then, turning back to me, she remarked, in her easy, careless way—

“When you come to see me in Barbison, as I hope you will, Miss Carr, I must devise some means to save you from such a torment; for, of course, you will sketch!”

“But you are not going away yet?” I exclaimed.

“Oh! yes, I am; the carriage is to come round for us in an hour.”

I was so amazed that my brush fell from my hand on my drawing, inflicting a great dab of green where green had no business to be. It was that very morning that I had unbosomed myself to Mrs. Smith concerning James Carr; our discourse had been most confidential, and not a word had she said about going away.

This was the first plain intimation I had of a state of things that was to endure between Mrs. Smith and me through many changes of feeling

and circumstance—a state of openness on my part and reticence on hers. I was surprised and sorry—so sorry that I felt an unpleasant tightening at my throat. I daresay Mrs. Smith saw what ailed me, but it was one of her rules to ignore unpleasant facts, and she adhered to it now.

I no longer cared for drawing. We went in together. In the hall we met the cook, who was coming down from Mademoiselle Aubrey's room, and who informed us that luncheon would soon be ready, but that Mademoiselle was too poorly to come down.

"*I never saw such a cold as hers,*" said the cook emphatically, and as if she were looking back over the experience of her fifty years. "*My opinion is that Mademoiselle Aubrey is very ill.*"

I do not know why I cared for the cook's opinion. I had not asked for it, and she gave it with the licence of an old servant; for, like Hermance and the gardener, she belonged to the house, and had been hired with it; but I looked at this brown, stout, elderly face of hers, which

had contracted thoughtful wrinkles over fricassées and entremets, as if *Æsculapius* himself had spoken. When she went her way it was a cruel stinging, and not a healing serpent that she left behind her.

“ Oh ! how I wish Docteur Renaud were not gone ! ” I said to Mrs. Smith ; for the good Docteur had been gone three days, telegrams from Paris having shortened even his brief holiday. Mrs. Smith looked at the black and white flags of the hall on which she stood, and answered not one word. I felt hurt at her indifference, and leaving her abruptly, I went up to my dear friend’s room. I found her sitting in her arm-chair by the window, with her forehead resting on her hand. She looked round as I came in, and showed me a flushed and feverish face and sunken eyes. She looked very ill indeed, but she laughed at me when I spoke of sending for a doctor. She was a good and wise woman, but a thorough sceptic with regard to medical skill in her own case.

“ What could a doctor tell me, Mignonne ? ” she asked. “ That I have got a cold ! Why, I

know it. That I am old! Why, I know that too. The Spaniards have a proverb about every man who has reached forty being his own doctor, and I think they are a wise people."

"Dear Mademoiselle," said I, sitting down by her, and speaking a little impatiently, "why should Spanish ways be our ways? When an inhabitant of Seville wants a house, he says to the architect, 'Here is so much ground; let me have a large garden, cool galleries, and, if there is any room left, apartments!' I suppose that does very well for Seville, but would it do for us?"

Mademoiselle Aubrey patted my cheek.

"You are as quaint as a little fairy," she said, "and you come out with odd bits of wisdom now and then. But let us talk of something else. Can you tell me when Mrs. Smith is going?"

"Then you do know she is going?" I exclaimed, opening my eyes.

"Yes, my dear, she came and told me. I am sorry I cannot go down and bid her good-bye."

Then she let her go; she did not press her to

stay, and yet she surely knew that Mr. de Lusignan would like to find her here. Such were my thoughts, and Mademoiselle Aubrey, giving me a clear, firm look, said, as if to answer them,

“Honour is shown in many ways, Mignonne. I *know* Mr. de Lusignan is on his way home, and knowing this, it would have been treachery to press Mrs. Smith to stay another hour. She came to us in dire extremity. She must be free to depart the moment she chooses to do so.”

“Dear Mademoiselle,” I exclaimed, a little mortified, “I should not like to entrap Mrs. Smith, or anyone.”

Mademoiselle Aubrey smiled provokingly in my face.

“Mignonne, you could not, even if you wished it,” she said. “Nature gave you a tell-tale pair of honest brown eyes—and very beautiful eyes they are too, tender and true!—with which I defy you to entrap a baby. And now leave me, and go to your luncheon, for my head aches, and I want rest.”

I obeyed; but as I looked back at her from the door, I was struck with her look of illness.

I remembered seeing such a look many a time on Uncle John's pale face, and a sudden terror seized me. What if she too were going to die?

"Miss Carr, how scared you look!" said Mrs. Smith, as we met on the stairs.

"Oh! Mademoiselle Aubrey is *so* ill!" I exclaimed, in sore distress. Mrs. Smith looked at me steadily; then, gently laying her hand on my shoulder, she said suddenly—

"Would you like me to stay with you?"

"Oh! yes," I cried, eagerly, "I should like it so much! But—but—"

Here I came to a full stop.

"But what?" she asked quietly.

"Mr. de Lusignan is coming back," I stammered; then, feeling how ungracious the remark must seem, I improved it by adding, "It is only fair to tell you so. I mean—that is to say—well, I mean that perhaps you do not like him."

Mrs. Smith smiled.

"My dear Miss Carr, what a very strange idea! However, my mind is quite made up. I will not leave you, especially to go back to Bar-

bison, whilst Mademoiselle Aubrey is so unwell."

And so the carriage, which was actually at the door, was sent away empty, and Mrs. Smith was with us still when my guardian arrived on the night of the following day.

CHAPTER XI.

MADÉMOISELLE AUBREY was much better. I was glad of it, though a little vexed to hear her boast that her Spanish proverb was a true one. Joy, however, being more potent to send me to sleep than vexation to keep me awake, I slept so soundly that my guardian's arrival took place without my knowledge. When I woke, however, and opened my window, the scent of a fragrant cigar stealing up from below gave me a warning which a peep from behind my muslin curtains confirmed. There was my guardian *in propria personâ*, and gazing at the stone vases in front of the dining-room windows with a look of calm content.

I was generally shy of intruding on Mr. de Lusignan. He was so ready for sarcasm and

laughter, so quick at detecting ridicule, that I was half afraid of him; but eager curiosity proved too strong for fear this morning. I dressed hastily, and was downstairs before Mr. de Lusignan's cigar was out.

His greeting was pleasant and friendly.

"Good morning, Bessie," he said kindly, holding out his hand. "Why, you are as fresh as a rose—no need of asking how you are. Mademoiselle Aubrey is well, of course?"

"She is better," I said gravely.

"Better! Nothing serious ailed her, I hope?"

"Indeed she was very poorly—so poorly that Mrs. Smith would not leave me alone."

No surer arrow than this was ever shot. Mr. de Lusignan turned round full upon me.

"What Mrs. Smith?" he asked.

"The lady whom we saw in Barbison," I replied, with much composure.

"And that lady is here in this house?"

"Yes; she came the day you left us. Her little boy was dying with the croup, and she brought him to Docteur Renaud, who saved

him. He is quite well again," I considerately added.

Still Mr. de Lusignan looked as if he could not believe his ears.

"And is the child—her child—is that child here?" he asked.

"Yes, with the nurse, Watkins."

Mr. de Lusignan drew a deep breath.

"Well, Bessie, your bag of news seems full," he said, after a while, "but you open it with a niggardly hand. Do not be so sparing, child."

He spoke impatiently. Ungrateful man! he little knew how I had hurried down to him, on account of that same bagful of news, and how only a proper sense of dignity made me deal out my tidings with well-assumed indifference. I now took pity on him, however, and told him all I knew. We had left the front of the house, and were walking along a cool alley still sparkling with morning dews. Birds carolled very sweetly above us, everything was fresh, living, and delightful, but Mr. de Lusignan took heed of nothing; he was absorbed in my tale. Never before had I had such a listener.

“ Well,” he said, drawing a deep breath, when I had done, “ it is her own doing. She is fast in my power now. I could not imagine how I should manage, but it is her own doing.”

The words recalled me to myself. I felt a secret compunction at having caused them. There was war between my guardian and Mrs. Smith. I had forgotten it; but now, hearing him boast of how he held her in his toils, my heart smote me for my forgetfulness. Unconscious that I sided with the enemy, he said eagerly,

“ Mrs. Smith must have written letters since she came here. Have you seen her writing?—is it at all like this?”

He drew a soiled card out of his pocket-book and showed it to me. I guessed that this was the card which Mademoiselle Aubrey had mentioned to me, but to my great relief I could answer with perfect truth:

“ I have not seen Mrs. Smith’s writing; I do not know it.”

His countenance fell a little.

“ *Tant pis,*” he said shortly; “ but look at this

well, Mignonne, bear this hand in mind, and if Mrs. Smith's should be like it, tell me so."

I did not answer. I had not the least intention of complying with my guardian's request, and felt affronted at the task laid upon me. Impartiality is not the gift of youth. It was not mine. I was a partisan, and a passionate one too. I had deserted my guardian's standard for Mrs. Smith's flag, and I felt ready to die in defence of my new colours. I never so much as dreamed of holding an even balance between these two, of giving something to one and something to the other. I was for Mrs. Smith out and out, and so far as I could do so without treason to the confidence that had been reposed in me, I resolved to help her against her enemy. My guardian, who understood me as little as most men of his years understand girls of eighteen, having got all he wanted out of me, no longer cared for my society, and showed me so by his silence.

"I think I shall go in now," I said; "I want to go to the house, and I am only interfering with your cigar."

With this arrow, which he received with an amused smile at my petulance, I left him, but I did not go straight back to the house. The morning was lovely; there was a pleasant shivering in the foliage above me, and gay trilling of birds hidden in the leaves, a low hum of bees busy with some tangled honeysuckle, which all delayed my steps and made me linger. So I walked on slowly, building my little romance the while. I was a great day-dreamer in those days. The world was not wide or full enough for me. I must needs add to its multitudes, and extend even its broad horizon. So I was always enacting dramas of my own, by the side of those dramas which life told me then, as it tells them to us all. I had a wonderful subject just now—the first interview of Mr. de Lusignan and his rebellious daughter-in-law. I could not believe that it would pass quietly. He was too impetuous to be patient, and self-possessed though she was, could Mrs. Smith be impenetrable?

Suppose that he taxed her with her identity, and, proving it, claimed the child! What would

she do? Deny his right, and maybe go off scornful and defiant! What then would be his remedy? That she would be untractable I felt sure. I could not forget how she had borne herself to Docteur Renaud, imperious and beautiful, a very queen in look and language. My heart beat, and my imagination, felt on fire as I thought of these things. But there was more than the love of a dramatic episode in my feelings for Mrs. Smith, and I began to think, since I was for her, I ought to warn her. She might not know of Mr. de Lusignan's return, and I could not bear to think that she should be taken by surprise. Why should I not go and tell her at once, in a careless way of course (with that gift of dissembling which was so strong in me), that Mr. de Lusignan had come back. My shortest way to the house was across a green, sunlit grass-plot. I ran over it, heedless of the sun; but just as I reached a group of gay laburnums with hanging yellow hair, and was going to step through them on the path, I heard my guardian's voice. Forgetting that he could not read my intention in my face, I stepped back

and hid behind a tall thorn, hoping that Mademoiselle Aubrey, whom he was no doubt addressing, would not detect me.

But it was not Mademoiselle Aubrey who now appeared by his side in the cool shady avenue. Walking by my guardian, taller than he was by half a head, I saw the beautiful Mrs. Smith, laughing and talking, and seeming in the brightest good-humour. That interview, which my imagination had painted in such tragic hues, was a tame affair after all, and my drama had melted into a light comedy. I cannot say which I felt most, amazed or disappointed. Mrs. Smith looked in a charming temper, and Mr. de Lusignan was as gallant and attentive as a lover in the first stage of his passion. Tall rose-bushes, on which crimson and snowy blossoms began to appear, grew by the path. He paused, in order to strip their thorny boughs, and to heap Mrs. Smith with the spoil; she took the flowers with careless grace, and seemed quite at her ease in receiving his homage.

“ Since it is the only flowers you care for, have them all,” he said. “ I wish I could transplant

the trees, and make them give you their fresh roses every morning just underneath your window ; but they would only die."

" And what a pity that would be !" she answered, with a little light, mocking laugh. " Well, I do like roses—but, my goodness ! you have not left one, and Miss Carr likes roses too."

They passed on. I had heard, and could scarcely believe my ears. Yes, I liked roses, and had told her so ; but Mrs. Smith had not given me the information with which she had just favoured my guardian. She had not said to me, " Well, I do like roses," in that voice ; and what was more, she had never shown that relish of my admiration, and that candid wish to subdue me, which I had just read in her blue eyes. I was very angry—so angry that I called her " a dreadful flirt," and, figuratively, of course, washed my hands of her concerns. Later, I learned to put a fairer and a truer construction upon Mrs. Smith's conduct, not merely in this instance, but in many another.

There was nothing of a flirt in her whole

being, for spite her beauty, which would have made it so easy, I could never detect in her the faintest wish to win a heart she did not really care for. Admiratioп she liked without disguise, just as she got it without effort ; but her heart was true, and her mind was pure ; only she could not help feeling, no more than she could help enjoying it, that every man who came near her was with regard to her as a moth is to the flame of a candle. Many women have the power of charming, but not with the same charm, nor over the same individuals. Some win the hearts of little children ; others are dear to cats and dogs ; others prevail over their own sex ; and I have heard of one lady who, by a subtle fascination which no one could fathom, got her female friends to vie in the mending of her stockings. Many women, on the other hand, are popular with men only. Beautiful women can be hated by men, or Mary Stuart or Marie Antoinette would never have died on a scaffold ; but I never knew a man who did not like Mrs. Smith. She was perfectly aware of her power, but she also knew that

it did not extend to women, and the knowledge helped to make her cool to her own sex. She knew well enough that I was an exception to this general rule, for she once said to me later, "Bessie, you are the only girl who ever cared for me, I do believe." But still I belonged to the sex from whose favour she had nothing to expect, and whom, quite naturally, without intent or design, she never tried to please.

Why was it so, I wonder? Why was this beautiful, warm-hearted, original creature in some sort excluded from the liking and regard even of my good and indulgent friend, Mademoiselle Aubrey? She neither could nor would say anything against her, but still she did not like her much; and yet, if there was one woman for whom Mrs. Smith ever had a foible, it was for this civil stranger, who kept her aloof by the most scrupulous courtesy. I had seen that from the first days of her stay with us—I saw it more plainly still after my guardian's return.

I now went straight back to the house in

high dungeon, leaving Mr. de Lusignan and Mrs. Smith to their flirtation, as I chose to call it. As I passed the dining-room windows, I saw Mademoiselle Aubrey sitting in one, reading the paper. She took off her spectacles, and smiled at me with her bright, genial face.

"How early you are out, Mignonne!" she said, bending out towards me. "Have you seen Mr. de Lusignan yet?"

I carelessly replied that I had just seen him in the grounds with Mrs. Smith.

"Already!" she exclaimed; then she added, with a smile—"I need not ask how they are getting on. Mr. de Lusignan is making himself agreeable to the pretty woman, and the pretty woman likes it."

This was so true a picture of what I had just seen, that I stared, amazed, at my friend, who, without minding it, leaned back in her chair and sighed.

"I wish it were all over," she said.

This brought me back from my righteous wrath against Mrs. Smith to my interest in that secret which she guarded so closely.

"But what can be her motive for not acknowledging herself Mr. de Lusignan's daughter-in-law?" I asked, in a low tone.

"There may be so many reasons, Mignonne. She is a Protestant; the child's grandfather is a Catholic."

I shook my head. I had noticed no such fervour of religious belief in Mrs. Smith as to justify this conjecture.

"I do not say it is that," resumed Mademoiselle Aubrey; "but one thing is clear, she will never confess until he compels her, and I wish he would or could, and that it were all over."

Two laughing voices now told us that the pair were coming. I ran up to my room to avoid them; but I could not thus shun Mrs. Smith. Presently I heard her step on the stairs. A quick smart tap at my door followed, and, though still very cross with her, I said, "Come in." She entered, fresh and lovely as the bunch of roses she held. Involuntarily I let some of my anger go when I saw her beautiful face in the doorway. She shut the door with a

quick hurried motion, and came up to me, looking full of fun.

"Oh, you think I did not see you when Mr. de Lusignan was gathering these," she said, shaking the roses at me, and sprinkling me with their dew. "What did you mean by hiding, Miss Carr? There, I have brought you the roses—I have not kept one. Where shall I put them?"

"But I do not want to take them from you," I said, rather stiffly.

"Oh! never mind that," she answered, with a cool disregard of objection on my part. "This old blue china beaker will just do."

She poured some water from my water-jug into the vase, and began settling the roses in it with a deft light hand. I was not much pleased, and maybe my tone shewed it when I said—

"I really do not wish to rob you of your flowers, Mrs. Smith."

"You mean that you will not have them?" she retorted, pausing in her task, and turning a little pale.

I was silent.

She took the roses out of the water, and deliberately went up to my open window, with so evident an intention of flinging them out into the court below, whence rose the voices of my guardian and Mademoiselle Aubrey, that I ran up to her, and, holding back her arm, cried, in sudden dismay—

“Oh! pray do not.”

“I will not have them, you know,” she said, looking round over her shoulder at me. She was smiling, and looked lovely, but her face was still pale and angry.

“Oh! of course, I must take them,” I answered, resignedly; “but it is too bad. Do take these crimson ones.”

She looked full at me. There was a deadly beauty in her face.

“Have one of those roses in the same room with my child and me!” she said, her lip quivering as she spoke—“not for an hour; not for a moment!” she added, her voice sinking with every word she uttered, till, with the last, it was a mere whisper.

I understood her now. It was Mr. de Lusignan's gift which she so hated. Who would have thought it that had seen and heard her an hour later, chatting gaily with my guardian across the breakfast-table? And, what is more, I do believe she liked his pretty speeches and evident admiration of her beauty. These were something distinct from himself, I daresay—an involuntary homage, not a free gift, like the roses that now filled my room with their fragrance.

CHAPTER XII.

IN common politeness, I suppose, Mrs. Smith could not leave the house immediately on the return of its master, but it was understood and agreed that she was to go back to Barbison at the end of the week. In the meanwhile, she was so pleasant and so much at her ease with Mr. de Lusignan, that the little incident of the roses, which were gently fading away in my room, seemed to me like a dream. But she could be so, and yet be true to her own heart. Her feelings were keen and lay deep, though they were not of the most lasting kind, but her temper was not subject to them. She could have been pleasant with the executioner on the scaffold-steps, and I am sure that she would have wished to charm him, and make him lament



his duty ; so, though she could have flung away the roses given by Mr. de Lusignan's hand, she could be on excellent terms with him, take his admiration as her due, and laugh and talk with him by the hour, if need be. And yet, knowing what I knew, it was not hard for me to see how deep a gulf yawned between these two. They might walk on either side, and exchange pleasant speech as they went along ; but the chasm was there. Everything seemed to divide them. We had not seen much of little Harry whilst he was ill ; but we saw next to nothing of him now. His mother always managed so that his walks or drives should take place either when we were out of the way, or when we expected them least. Mr. de Lusignan tried to defeat her, but she was too vigilant ; and, after a few ineffectual attempts, he quietly gave it up. Indeed, there was a tinge of affectation in his indifference to the child when he came across him. It was odd to see a meeting between these two. They were much alike. They had the same cast of features ; the same dark complexion ; the same brown eyes ; and

they looked at each other much in the same way—Mr. de Lusignan not saying a word, the child silent as a little mouse, and solemn as a judge; each seeming on his guard with the other. My guardian, however, was not a good dissembler. His carelessness towards the boy did not agree with the keenness he displayed in other matters. He was always charming company with Mrs. Smith; but she could not utter a word that he did not listen to with silent attention. She could not drop a hint in which the past was concerned, howsoever remotely, that Mr. de Lusignan was not all ears and eager watchfulness. Yet, so far as I could see, she never said anything from which he could draw the least conclusion. The past she alluded to had not the most distant connection with the present. As to Watkins, she was so stupid, and such a slave to her mistress, that she was useless, or worse than useless, in all matters concerning information. I am not sure that Mr. de Lusignan ever condescended to make any attempt upon her; but I am sure that any such would have been a failure. And

so the days passed, and we reached Friday, and Mrs. Smith was to leave us on the Saturday morning.

It was a lovely day, and we were to go and visit the rocks of Boulogny, but when the time came, Mrs. Smith's head ached, and she could not accompany us. I was in her room when she told me so—for I often went to her room now in the morning, and we had many a pleasant chat, in which Mrs. Smith always contrived to talk agreeably and amusingly, but to tell me nothing that I could repeat—I mean to the detriment of her secret—for a secret she certainly had—even I, slender though was my share of penetration, saw as much. She might have said what she pleased so far as I was concerned—her secrets were safe with me; but she was on her guard, and I was no more trusted than any one else in the house.

“I am so sorry your head aches,” I said, with chagrin. “I shall not enjoy the rocks of Boulogny without you.”

Mrs. Smith was leaning back in a deep arm-chair, with closed eyes; for though she could

be full of life and energy when she chose, she had a habit of being always languid and tired when she was not interested. She half opened her beautiful eyes as I spoke, and with a winning smile she said :

“ That is prettily said of you, Bessie—I beg your pardon, but I do so like the name ‘ Bessie ; ’ and the best is, that you always say these pretty things as if you meant them. Well, I am sorry my head aches. I think it must be writing to that tiresome Paris dressmaker, Madame André, who will not send me home my things. But I have just informed her that if I do not get them by next week, she may keep them.”

“ And I have been writing to James,” I said, with a sigh. “ Would you believe it, Mrs. Smith, he scolded me because I was ten days without writing to him.”

Mrs. Smith laughed.

“ Ten days ! Why, if you cared for him, you would write to him every day, and twice a day even.”

“ Oh ! but what should I write about ? ” I

cried, alarmed at the prospect of such extensive correspondence. "And as to that, he does not write twice a day to me, does he?"

She smiled—a provoking smile, which she had when she pleased.

"What a pair of lovers!" she said, with gentle mockery. "And are you taking your letters to Boulogny?" she added, glancing at the letter which I held in my hand. "Is there a post-office there, hidden in the rocks, which Miss Carr delights in?"

"No; but there is a post-office in Fontainebleau, to which I am going now."

"Are you? Then would it trouble you too much to take charge of my letter too? Watkins stupidly left it behind when she took out Harry awhile ago."

She took the letter from the table where it was lying, as if to hand it to me, but I turned my head away.

"Please do not ask me," I said, in a low tone—"please do not."

"Please do not!" she echoed, with gentle irony. "Why, my dear Miss Carr, the whole

world is welcome to turn that letter inside out. Here it is," she added, holding it up, and reading the direction aloud. "Madame André, Rue d'Amsterdam, 22; and if either you or anyone else in this house should care to open it, and see what French I write, why, either you or that 'anyone' is welcome."

"No one in this house would do such a thing," I answered, gravely. "But, please, I would rather not post your letter."

I said no more; but I suppose I had said enough, for Mrs. Smith carelessly put the letter back again on the table. I turned away so as not to see the writing, and soon after this I left her.

As I walked down the Rue Royale I wondered whether I had not said too much—whether, in my wish to be true to Mrs. Smith, I had not in some sort been false to the trust reposed in me. I had certainly warned her; now I had no right to warn her, for I had no right to remember what had been said to me, so far as to give her the least hint about it. These conscientious scruples were still troubling me when I came

back ; and very useless was my trouble—as the event soon proved.

We were not to go to Boulogny for another hour, and when I passed through the gates which had once opened for the beautiful and ambitious Gabrielle, Mademoiselle Aubrey sat working in the dining-room, and Mr. de Lusignan was reading the morning paper. I had scarcely joined them, feeling a most guilty traitor, when Watkins came in too, with the child in her arms ; and almost at the same moment, as if she had been watching in order to intercept them on their return, Mrs. Smith came down with her letter in her hand. The dining-room door was open, and we all saw her stepping down the stairs in her long black dress—fair, graceful, and stately, like a young Diana, when the Goddess was still in her prime, if it so be that there was for these immortals a rise and wane like that of human loveliness. She held the letter in her hand, as I said, and it seemed to me as if she held it thus openly, spite the warning I had given her, from that spirit of defiance which has led so many women to perdition. I

saw Mademoiselle Aubrey and my guardian exchange a swift involuntary look. He rose and said politely,

“I hope your headache is better, Mrs. Smith?”

“Not much,” she replied, looking fresh and lovely as a rose. “I shall not——”

Here Watkins stumbled on the gravel, and fell with the child, who uttered a piercing cry. In a moment his mother flew out to him. She turned to Watkins, who was picking herself up slowly, and her beautiful face was blazing with sudden anger as she cried—

“How dare you let him fall!—how dare you!”

Poor Watkins remained dumb, whilst Mrs. Smith, snatching the child from her, first ascertained that he had not a scratch, then smothered him with kisses.

“The fates themselves are for me,” triumphantly said Mr. de Lusignan, picking up the letter which had fallen almost at his feet. He opened his pocket-book, compared the card treasured there with the letter dropped by Mrs. Smith, then looked at Mademoiselle Aubrey; and I read in that look, bright, and exulting, and significant,

that Mrs. Smith's secret was gone out of her own keeping. She came back with the child in her arms, softly comforting him.

"You have dropped your letter, Mrs. Smith," said my guardian, going out to meet her in the hall. He handed it back to her, as I thought, but instead of the letter it was the card which he purposely put in her hand. She looked at it, then let it fall contemptuously on the black and white flags.

"I beg your pardon," he said, seeming to discover his mistake and picking up his card; he this time gave her the letter.

They exchanged looks. I thought that surely now the storm would burst; but no, my guardian added not another word, and she took her letter back without comment.

"Watkins, will you post that, if you please," she said, handing the letter to the maid.

She was going up to her room with the child still in her arms, and without giving one of us a look, when my guardian said:

"Is your headache still so bad that we cannot have the pleasure of your company at Boulogny to-day, Mrs. Smith?"

She turned round on the stairs and confronted him. Again they exchanged looks ; and in those looks I read a quiet defiance that half frightened me. "Leave the house whilst I am out of it if you dare !" I fancied that his look said ; and in hers I imagined that I read the answer :

"Defy me if *you* dare !"

"I cannot have that pleasure, thank you," she said civilly, and she went on.

People talk of the power of circumstances over human lives ; they speak of destinies that are moulded by little accidents and strange coincidences. These are but empty words to me. To me life has ever been more or less the fulfilment of those words of Jean Paul : "Character is Destiny." The destiny which ruled my life was called Mrs. Smith. On those subtle changes in her variable temper which I note down here, hung the joys and sorrows of my life. If, as I most assuredly should have done in her case, she had gone out to post her letter with Watkins and the child, and never come back, the whole course of my life would have been other from what it has been and is

still. But she was brave to imprudence. She scorned to fly till defeat was inevitable—flight was useless.

I wondered why my guardian did not urge his point; I wondered why he did not tax her plainly with being his son's widow; but he too liked this contest—he too was defiant and felt strong, for he had an arrow in his quiver of which Mrs. Smith knew naught, or she would scarcely have been so reckless and so bold.

He now said rather ironically:

“Since Mrs. Smith’s headache is so bad that she cannot leave her room, we must go to Bouligny without her.”

Mademoiselle Aubrey was stout, and by taste and habit no pedestrian. So we had a carriage to go to Bouligny. But before we were half way, my variable guardian changed his mind.

“Let us go to the Sanguinède,” he said, and to the Sanguinède we went. This is a pretty little fountain up in the rocks, and in the very heart of the forest. The water trickles gently from under a little dark arch, and shines in a dark stone tunnel with a faint glimmer. Ferns and

tangled weeds grow in the rocks above and around it. The spot is much visited by tourists, and mossy banks, and wooden seats and tables have been provided for pic-nic parties. A man and his wife are the keepers of the spot; they provide visitors with refreshments, and keep a stall garnished with carved souvenirs of the place—penholders, inkstands, reels, bracelets, needle-cases, rulers, and paper-knives, being the chief staple of their little stock.

“Do not look at them, Mignonne,” said Mr. de Lusignan, seeing me attracted to these wares. “They are horrid trash, and all impositions as well—made in Paris or Switzerland nine-tenths of them.”

I was not convinced, and internally resolved to purchase a pen-holder for James; but obediently turned away. A young girl of sixteen or so, with lively black eyes, the keeper’s daughter, was standing by, ready to show us the fountain, which we had not yet seen.

“Will you taste the waters of the fountain?” she said, in a glib, high, cicerone voice. “The Emperor drinks of them every year. They are

ferruginous waters—very cool and pleasant."

This little ceremony being complied with, we were left to wander about at our will. Fontainebleau was very empty that year, and the Sanguinède was quite lonely on this afternoon. A lovely solitude of grand rocks, whence the eye got many a green glimpse of forest sloping down below. Mists of heat hung above that undulating plain of soft verdure ; the air was still ; the sky had not a cloud ; lizards basked in the sun, and there was a faint chirruping of birds. It was all very beautiful, but too calm for my volatile guardian.

"I suppose you have got enough of it," he soon said ; but his sister-in-law, who knew that I had brought my sketch-book, remarked kindly :

"I believe you wish to visit the grottoes of Saint Germain—suppose you leave us here to rest the while."

The suggestion was after Mr. de Lusignan's own heart, for it gave him motion without our company. So he adopted it at once, and taking the keeper of the Sanguinède for his

guide, he left us by the little fountain, sitting in the shade, Mademoiselle Aubrey reading, and I drawing hard and fast, and feeling the happiest of mortals. A grand composition had already flashed across my mind. That fountain should be the background of a picture in which Mrs. Smith was to be the prominent figure. What she should be doing there I did not ask myself, not having time; but I supposed I should find it out; and in the meanwhile I worked at my background with all the ardour of a young artist in the first season of art.

Oh! surely there is magic in the sweetness of that early bondage, to which we all more or less succumb; for who are they so matter-of-fact or so cold as not to have kissed once on a time the lips of the Fairy Queen, like Thomas the Rhymer, and, like him, become her slave? That kiss seals our fate. What she bids, we must henceforth do; when she calls, we must go. Her name is Fancy, whatever guise she may take. She wields palette and brush with the young painter, and shows him picture after picture of his covering the walls of palaces.

She whispers in the composer's ear, and his music streams forth through oratorios and operas in glorious abundance; and he is famous for ever. She sits behind the clerk's desk in the counting-house, and he sees his ships making their way across the ocean, freighted with wealth untold. To all, whatever their venture may be, she is lavish of promises and fond illusions; she comes from fairy-land with her hands full of them, and scatters them without stint or measure as she goes along. To me, as I sat there, Her Fairy Majesty was content to show forth a water-colour drawing, in which there should be a romantic little fountain; and on that background of sombre rock and tender green, a beautiful woman, smiling out at the beholder in all her witchery. The Fairy Queen, however, did not visit Mademoiselle Aubrey, but in her stead she had the sun, who peeped in upon her most intrusively. She shifted her place again and again, then lost patience.

"I suppose I can leave you here, Mignon," she said, "and go and take a little walk down the valley of the Solle?"

"Indeed you can, Mademoiselle," I replied, eagerly. "You see how quiet a place this is."

It was, indeed, very still. I fancied that the woman and the young girl whom I had seen must both have gone to sleep, so silent was everything around me, but as soon as my companion was gone I found out my mistake. A shrill voice proceeding from the spot where the stall stood, suddenly exclaimed,

"Well, and what have you brought?"

To which question a rough voice answered—

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" cried the shrill voice—"no bottles!"

"No."

"Bottles!" I thought; "wine, cider, or beer, *à la bonne heure*. But what can these people want with bottles? Do they sell the insipid waters of that little trickling thing?" I was surprised at this, but the next question bewildered me still more.

"No bottles," repeated the shrill voice, angrily; "and windmills—did you bring any windmills?"

From the tone in which this question was put, it was plain that, if the rough-voiced speaker had not brought any windmills, matters were very bad indeed at the Sanguinède. And he had not.

“No,” he answered, doggedly, “I have not brought any windmills.”

He did not complain that these windmills were heavy and cumbersome, but he seemed to stand upon his right to bring them or not, according to his pleasure. I could bear this no longer. I must know what sort of giant this was who was expected to bring windmills to the Sanguinède; but I had no need to make the attempt. The shrill voice soon enlightened me, by asking, indignantly—

“And what am I to say to the lady who ordered a dozen of bottles and seven windmills last month, because I told her they were the best needle-cases and mètre-measures to be found in all Fontainebleau?”

So here was a fall; these bottles and windmills were only needle-cases and yard-measures —only wooden toys fashioned thus to lure a

few francs out of the pockets of idle ladies. Still it was a pretty fancy, and I did wish I could get a windmill for my dear Mrs. Smith. She was not very industrious, to be sure, but she was inordinately fond of knick-knacks of all sorts, as I already knew, and I was sure that a windmill would take her fancy. A pause of silence, which I found pleasant, followed the bit of dialogue I had heard. Then, suddenly, the girl's voice exclaimed, gaily—

“ You come too late, Monsieur, the place is taken.”

“ Is it? Then I shall stay here with you, Madeleine.”

The voice which answered thus was a pleasant voice; a man's voice, full and young, which, it seemed to me, I had heard before.

“ But you cannot draw here,” said Madeleine.

“ Oh! yes, I can. I have those ferns and yonder old tree—besides, I am tired of the fountain. How do you get on, Madeleine ?”

“ Oh! so well! As soon as anyone comes, I run out and say, ‘ Will you taste the waters of

the fountain? The Emperor drinks of them every year; they are ferruginous waters, very cool and pleasant.' And I like it," she added, bursting out into a free merry peal of girlish laughter, which made me feel sure that the shrill-voiced woman was not close by.

The young man laughed too; then I suppose he set to his drawing, for there was another pause of silence, during which I began to wonder why Mademoiselle Aubrey stayed so long away.

"What, all alone, Mignonne!" said Mr. de Lusignan, now coming up one of the paths behind me with his guide.

I told him how and why Mademoiselle Aubrey had left me, and that I feared she had gone astray.

"Very likely," coolly said the guide, "strangers will go about alone, and they will think they know the right path, and, of course, they take the wrong turnings, and get lost."

I was much frightened, but Mr. de Lusignan laughed at my fears.

"Stay here, Mignonne," he said; "we shall

go down the valley, and soon find and bring her back, depend upon it."

"But I would rather not stay here," I said, tying up my things in a great hurry.

"Then go and sit in the carriage," he said, coolly; and having thus decreed that I was not to accompany him, he left me.

CHAPTER XIII.

VERY disconsolately I walked away from the fountain to the shady place where the carriage was standing. Madeleine was invisible, the stall was deserted, and, I suppose, the young painter had got tired of the ferns and the old tree, for he, too, had vanished. I had to cross one of those open places planted with trees, which are called dormoirs—perhaps because, in bygone times, they were used by cattle for their rest during the heat of the day or the freshness of the night. It was cool and green, and had the solemn look which is so striking in all these places of deep leafy shade when you enter them from the hot glare of day without. Involuntarily I stood still, feeling the beauty of the place, as Nature, when she bade these trees

grow in stately grace, and spread their green arms between earth and sky, surely meant that I, that any gazer should feel it, in the very depths of my heart.

As I stood thus, forgetting myself for a moment, I heard voices on the road, from which a hedge of tangled brushwood divided me. I started with something more than surprise, for surely this was the voice of Mrs. Smith. I knew those gay tones, so light, so frank, so free.

“Well,” she was saying, “what if I should never go back to Barbison? I am free to lose a season’s rent, I suppose.”

“If you would only let me be where you are,” pleaded the other voice, tenderly, but remonstratively; and I knew that voice too, though it now spoke English with a warm accent, which was like an echo of James Carr’s—it was that of the young painter, whose place by the fountain I had usurped, and who had been talking to Madeleine.

“Oh! but that would never do,” she answered, in a clear, decisive tone. “Have you where I am!—no, no, thank you. We may

meet now and then, but there must be no following of me, *if you please.*"

There was a pause of submission, no doubt, which made me recollect that I had no business to stand there listening to Mrs. Smith's discourse with this unknown friend of hers; so I walked on, and as the speakers were walking on too, but in an opposite direction, I only heard this remark from Mrs. Smith, which gave me unexpected light on another subject.

"You must not suppose that I came here for you to see how I fit with the fountain, Mr. George. I want some windmills."

"Windmills!" he echoed, in slight surprise, and I heard no more.

The driver was asleep, and the carriage was a most uncomfortable place to wait in, but I did not feel tempted to go back to the fountain. I would have done and borne anything to shun a meeting with Mrs. Smith. I thought no harm of her, and would have vowed that she was innocent in the face of much stronger evidence than I now had against her; but how could I help wondering at a headache which

came and went so suddenly? How could I help knowing that she had come to the Sanguinède because she thought we were in Bouligny? It was plain enough that to meet us was the last of her wishes, and that, whether with or without reason, she did not choose that this Mr. George should claim her acquaintance in our presence.

I thought no harm of her, but I felt unhappy. My little span of life had been spent in that open day-light which is the charm of youth; and even James Carr had not cast the shadow of a mystery upon it. I could not get accustomed to the secrecy in which it pleased Mrs. Smith to envelope the least of her actions. She was going away from us to-morrow—what need was there to deceive us to-day? The thought had scarcely risen within me, when love, ever watchful and tender, called out, “Treason!” Mrs. Smith was secretive, but she was as truthful as anyone who has a secret to guard well may be. Why should not her head have ached when she said so? and why should not that headache have left her after we were

gone? Very true, but then there was that appointment at the Sanguinède. What if there were? pleaded love again. Was she not free to meet a dozen of Mr. Georges, if such were her pleasure. In short, long before the time when I heard my guardian and Mademoiselle Aubrey, who had not lost her way after all, coming back, Mrs. Smith had prevailed once more, and was victorious on all the line. I could not help it, and surely it was well for me that I could not. Is not that perfect faith in the objects of its love, the faith more of worship than of love, one of the best and dearest attributes of early life? Woe be to the young to whom doubt is easy, and trust a lesson hard to learn!

“How is Mrs. Smith’s headache?” were my guardian’s first words when we came back.

They were spoken to Hermance, who opened her round black eyes.

“Madame Smith looked very well when she went out with Watkins,” she replied; “and the little Monsieur looked very well too.”

Mademoiselle Aubrey glanced at her brother-

in-law, who, scorning to look uneasy, I suppose, smiled as he said, in English—

“Mrs. Smith will come back.”

The words were scarcely uttered when Mrs. Smith, Watkins, and the child all came in at the gate. No carriage brought them. They looked as if they had just been in the forest for five minutes, and come back again to the house. Mrs. Smith was fresh and lovely, and quite gay and pleasant. Her headache was gone, she said, and she felt herself once more.

“Well, and how did you like Bouligny?” she asked.

She spoke so evidently to me that I was bound to answer. I looked dreadfully confused, I daresay, as I stammered—

“We—we did not go to Bouligny.”

Our eyes met. She read the truth in mine; but turning quietly from me, she said, addressing my guardian—

“And where, then, did you go?”

“To the Sanguinède. Of course you know it?”

“Yes,” she carelessly answered, “I have been there.”

She was satisfied that I had not betrayed her. I suppose ; for, as she passed me in the hall, she gently laid her hand on my shoulder, and kissing my cheek, she said kindly—

“ You are a dear little thing ; but I should not have cared a pin, you know.”

And I am sure that she would not. She might choose to keep her own counsel, but she was far too honest and too brave to care for discovery. The words, such as they were, did me a world of good. I was sure now, sure as I lived, that my idol was without a blemish ; and not having the sad experience which reconciles older travellers to the golden idols with feet of clay that abound in life, I was, as I said, made happy. But my guardian had seen Mrs. Smith whispering to me, and that suspicion which never slept in him was roused.

“ What was Mrs. Smith saying to you, Mignonne ?” he asked.

Luckily I could answer him.

“ Mrs. Smith told me that I was a dear little thing,” I replied, gaily.

“ Most true, Mignonne ; but what about ?”

Was there ever a woman who did not know how to parry a question?

"Can I not be a dear little thing without its being about something?" I asked, in so injured a tone that my guardian laughed, and the mistrustful dragon in his bosom took another nap.

All this was not to endure long. A few hours more, and the inevitable crisis came.

Dinner was late that evening. When I went down I found my guardian and Mademoiselle Aubrey coming in from the garden, where they had been taking a walk, which in my thoughts I could not help calling a private conversation; and just as I joined them on the terrace in front of the dining-room, Mrs. Smith appeared, with little Harry in her arms.

"Let us all sit here awhile," said Mr. de Lusignan, setting out chairs for us in front of the house. "Dinner is all but ready, and it is really cooler here than in the garden."

"Besides, one can make fun of the people in the street as they pass," laughed Mrs. Smith, with a shrewd guess at my sarcastic guardian's real motives. He did not deny the implied

impeachment. He was very merry this morning—unusually so, considering that it was before dinner; as garrulous, indeed, as Mademoiselle Aubrey was grave and silent. A soft yellow light filled the warm sky, where sunset fires had left many a rosy flush, and still tinged many a dainty little cloud. I sat admiring Mrs. Smith's perfect profile as she leaned back in her chair, with little Harry clasped and half asleep in her arms. In that golden evening light she looked all but divine.

"What!—a visitor for us!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. de Lusignan, as a carriage came rolling up the street, and stopped at the gate. "Why, who can it be?"

"Oh! I hope it is not James!" I thought; but did not say, as my guardian rose and walked rather hastily towards the gate. He came back after awhile, not with James, thank Heaven! but with a lady in black. She was stout, and walked slowly.

"My dear Mademoiselle," he said, addressing his sister-in-law, and studiously avoiding to look at Mrs. Smith, "this is Mrs. Wood."

I suppose I was on the watch for everything that might turn up, for I remembered, without effort, that the lodging-house keeper at Notting Hill was called Mrs. Wood. A dead silence fell on us all as my guardian uttered her name. My first quick look had been for Mrs. Smith. At the sight of the new-comer she had turned white as death. Her very lips were bloodless; but save that she clasped her child more closely to her heart, she did not stir. The boy, wakening from his sleep, fixed his solemn brown eyes on the stranger, and watched her with that curious gaze of childhood which is apt to be so disconcerting. But Mrs. Smith was a full-blown woman of fifty; one of those women cased in flesh as in armour, and whose very plumpness is stolid. No emotion of any kind appeared on her immovable countenance.

“ Ah ! Mrs. Smith, how do you do, ma’am ? ” she said, addressing her coolly. “ I hope you have been quite well, ma’am, since we met at Notting Hill.”

Mrs. Smith rose, with her boy in her arms. She did not give Mrs. Wood a look, but faced

my guardian in all the pride of her imperial beauty. So may have looked Maria Theresa when she fired Hungarian hearts, and Hungarian swords flashed out at the oath, “Moriamur pro Rege nostro Maria Theresa.”

“Well, sir,” she said, in a low voice, “what next ?”

How grand she was in her calm defiance!—a fair young lioness at bay!

“Nothing,” he answered, coolly. “I believe you will not deny now that you lived as my son’s wife in Mrs. Wood’s house at Notting Hill. I believe you will not deny now that you are that Louisa Jones whom my son married three years ago in Greenham Church.”

It seemed to me as if even the faint hue of life which had remained in her white cheeks went out of them as he spoke. She looked so ghastly, that I thought she was going to faint; but she rallied again by a violent effort of her strong, passionate will.

“Granted,” she said—“I was your son’s wife. I married him, as you say, in What-do-you-call-it Church ; and my name is Henrietta—

no, Louisa Jones. I also lived with him at Notting Hill. What next?"

She tightened her hold of the child as she spoke, unconsciously telling us the secret of her fears.

"Why did you drive me to it?" he answered, in his most gentle tones; whilst a light both mellow and tender shone in his brown eyes. "What have I ever asked save that you would let me have my share of my son's child? Why have you robbed me of him for these two weary years?"

She turned upon him, the colour burning in her cheeks, the light flaming from her eyes.

"Who robbed me of my husband?" she asked, in a low voice that ended in a wail. "Who from a wife turned me into a widow? Who doomed him to die the death that he died of? Did you think I had forgotten that? Did you think I wanted you to deal with this boy as you had dealt with his father?"

Mr. de Lusignan was silent, but his lips quivered. He was enduring torture, and she knew and saw it, and was not softened.

"What next?" she asked again. "Now that you have got me, what will you do with me?"

Mademoiselle Aubrey now interfered. She went up to Mrs. Smith, and, laying her hand gently on her arm, she said—

"My dear, be merciful!"

"Be merciful!" repeated Mrs. Smith, looking full in her eyes, and seizing her two hands in one of her own. "You who so loved him!—you tell me to be merciful to the man who killed him!"

"I want no mercy," said Mr. de Lusignan, sharply, and almost sternly; "this boy is my son's child, and I know what my right over him is."

"In—deed!" retorted Mrs. Smith, sitting down, and looking calm again. "I wonder what your right is, and how you will exercise it."

She put down the child as if to defy my guardian, more completely, to touch him. She leaned back in her seat, folded her hands on her lap in calm inaction, and began tossing her little right foot up and down in a saucy, mutinous

way, which was familiar to her, whilst she looked at Mr. de Lusignan through her half-shut eyes.

“The law,” began my guardian, whose brown eyes were deep and angry now.

“I’ll tell you what,” suddenly broke in Mrs. Smith, as her eye fell on Mrs. Wood, and speaking in a tone so untragic that we all stared, “I’m heartily tired of this; and if you will just send back that woman to England *at once*, why, I’ll give in; if you won’t, I shall step into the carriage that brought her, and be off this moment with my child, and you will attempt to stop me, if you dare, that’s all!”

Mr. de Lusignan was taken by surprise, and he hesitated, whilst Mrs. Wood looked rather abashed, spite her coolness.

“I shall count ten whilst you make up your mind,” said Mrs. Smith. “Harry, come here. One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—”

“Stop!” cried Mr. de Lusignan, reddening with shame and anger. “Mrs. Wood cannot go back this moment, but to-morrow——”

She did not condescend to argue, but gather-

ing her light burnous around her, rose quickly, and yet with so evident an intention of fulfilling her threat, that we all uttered an exclamation.

"I tell you I will not stop a moment with that woman in this house, this town, or this country!" she added, her voice rising with every word she uttered; "and what is more, Watkins shall go with her and see her safe at Notting Hill, or it is no bargain. And if you or she object, I go; and we shall see what right the law will give you here over my child or me."

Mr. de Lusignan saw that he had no other alternative than submission. He bit his lips, but he yielded, or he tried to yield, with a good grace.

"Ladies must be obeyed," he said, sarcastically. Then, turning to Mrs. Wood, who now looked both uncomfortable and discomfited, he led her away a few paces, and held some private conversation with her; whilst Mrs. Smith went to the foot of the staircase, and raising her clear young voice, called out,

“Watkins, come down, if you please.”

Thus summoned, the stolid Watkins soon appeared.

“That is Mrs. Wood,” said her mistress, nodding towards the obnoxious lodging-house keeper, as if she had been some insect—“Mrs. Wood has been good enough to come all the way from Notting Hill to look at me. Now that she has seen me, she is going back at once; and I want you, Watkins, to go with her and see her safe at Notting Hill again.”

Watkins looked rather bewildered; but her obedience was of the unquestioning order, and all she said was,

“Very well, ma’am. Shall I go and put on my things?”

“Do—the carriage is waiting. And, Watkins, you are not to lose sight of her, you know.”

“Very well, ma’am,” said Watkins; and the mulish expression in her face was so apparent that I felt sure Mrs. Smith’s orders would be carried out.

Strong wills rule this world. Before ten

minutes were over, Mrs. Wood and Watkins had departed in company, and in twenty-four hours Watkins had returned to us, looking rather fagged, indeed, but otherwise much the same as ever. She had not gone as far as Notting Hill with Mrs. Wood, this being no longer that lady's place of abode; but she had seen her safe in Dover, and there left her.

When the carriage drove away, Mr. de Lusignan went up to his daughter-in-law, and said,

“ You have had your way ; and now that we are going, I hope, to live in peace and amity, do you mind telling me why you have sent away that poor Mrs. Wood so ruthlessly ? ”

A smile of scorn curled her lovely lips, and without looking at him, she answered :

“ I hate traitors ! ”

“ Surely you never reposed any confidence in Mrs. Wood ? ”

“ No ; but she betrayed to you for money ”—here her eye fell upon him in quiet scorn—“ the secret which I would have given my life's blood to guard. I could not endure to look at her for one minute longer. Then I knew that if she

stayed here you would be questioning her concerning that past upon which, it seems, she was a spy. That past," she added, with quivering lips, "is mine ; and, if I can prevent it, neither you nor any other living creature shall meddle with it. Of course, when you go to England you will see that creature and talk to her as much as you please ; but I am rid of her till then."

" You might have trusted me," gravely said Mr. de Lusignan.

A smileflitted across her paleface—a smile very sweet, as all her smiles were, but so desolate—a smile that said so plainly, " I can put my trust in none," that it made my heart ache.

And now, as, spite our drama, the world around us had been going on all this time, the dinner-bell rang.

" I suppose we have a quarter of an hour, as usual?" said Mrs. Smith, in her easiest tones. " If so, I shall put on something cooler, for this heat is intolerable." And taking her child by the hand, she went up the stairs, talking to him all the way.

"She bears it more bravely than I had expected," said my guardian, with a gleam of triumph in his eye.

"Do not be too sure of that," answered his sister-in-law, in a low tone.

And he was wrong, and she was right, as I found when I went up to Mrs. Smith's room, sent there, long after the quarter of an hour had expired, by my guardian.

She had exchanged her silk dress for one of black barége; her white shoulders gleamed through a black lace *fichu*, fastened at the breast with a crimson rose; another, crimson too, was in her brown hair; and save these two roses, she wore no ornament of any kind—not even a bracelet on her beautiful arms, which for the first time I saw bare. But though she had thus adorned herself, as if to grace my guardian's triumph, she had allowed its bitterness to flood her very soul, if I might judge by the passion of grief in which I found her. She was half sitting on the edge of the bed, a very old-fashioned four-posted one, leaning against one of its dark mahogany pillars, and her arms were

thrown above her head, in an attitude of abandonment and despair, which her wan face and sunken eyes confirmed.

“ You come to tell me that I am late for dinner ? ” she said languidly. “ I suppose I am. Do you know what I was thinking of, Bessie ? I was thinking that, if these words, ‘ O Death ! where is thy victory, where is thy sting ? ’ are true for others, they are not true for me. This very day Death has prevailed over me, and thrown me in the dust ; this very day Death has pierced me with his dart, and made my flesh quiver with the pain. Oh ! my love, my life, my darling ! ” she added, with a great cry, “ if you were not dead, I should be strong ! —if you were not dead, should I be here, eating the bread of the man who murdered you ? Whilst you lived I could hide in your kind arms, and feel safe there. And, Bessie, I was so happy—the happiest of women. I was dressed as you see me now when we met for the first time ; I was dressed as you see me now when we parted, and from that first hour to that last it was perfect bliss. Think, then,” she added, with a

sudden flash of her blue eyes and a quivering of her whole features—"think how I must hate that man below, who parted us for ever!"

"Ah! think how he too suffers," I pleaded—"his son, his only son!"

"His son!" she echoed, with some scorn. "Bessie, they were as unlike as are light and darkness. One was all—— But never mind; he is your guardian, and in his way kind to you, and I am spoiling his dinner and yours, and that dear good Mademoiselle Aubrey's, so let us go down. I suppose I look a fright?"

She glanced towards the glass, and seeing her fair image there in all its beauty, she could not help smiling at herself, pleased like a child at her own loveliness; and just taking up a black fan spangled with silver which was lying on the table, she came down with me.

I was young then. How often I find myself writing those words; but time is the key to many a mystery which perplexes youth strangely. Time has explained to me why Mrs. Smith, after being in such a pssion of grief upstairs, was so pleasant below. She could not grieve

long, she soon wearied of suffering, and went back to enjoyment for relief. Now, however hateful she might find Mr. de Lusignan, she could not help enjoying his evident admiration of her. He was by no means an old man. He could be a very agreeable man, and he admired her, and he was proud of her. He was proud that this lovely creature should have been his son's wife, and should be the mother of his grandchild. He had spared no trouble and no cost to establish his claim over her and her child, and he was ready, in a figurative sense of course, to lay himself and his possessions at her feet. Everything in his manner as they met at the dinner-table implied homage, which his daughter-in-law accepted with mingled grace and dignity. Only once, when he addressed her by her own name, and called her Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, did she change colour and show some emotion ; but she soon came to herself again. After dinner we had the child, whom Hermance had taken, now that Watkins was gone, and for the first time his grandfather was allowed to caress him and play with him to his heart's content. I had had

no idea that my guardian could indulge in such gambols as he now went on with, nor that this little solemn-eyed Harry could laugh so shrilly as he did this evening. The two were soon fast friends, and Mrs. Harry Lusignan, fanning herself softly, looked on with a smile, and seemed pleased. Indeed it had all been so genial during dinner time, and it was all so pleasant during the evening, that the passionate outpourings of love and hate which I had heard in Mrs. Smith's room seemed like a dream to me. And thus it is in this shifting scene of life, where nothing ever abides, nor sorrow, nor love, nor scorn, but everything changes for evermore.

CHAPTER XIV.

EARLY the next morning there was a tap at my door ; and when I said "Come in," it was Mr. de Lusignan's daughter-in-law who entered.

"Bessie," she said, in tones half sad, half mirthful, "I have come to bury Mrs. Smith. Your tongue slipped several times during dinner yesterday evening, and it would slip again and again if we did not find a remedy. Now you must know," she added, giving me a wistful look, in which there was a world of tenderness that was for the past, not for me, "you must know that if there be a sweetness in my new position, it is in hearing my own name. It softened me, spite of myself, to hear your guardian utter it last night ; I could not feel half so angry with

him after that as I felt before. Well, the remedy I have designed to the Mrs. Smith's horror is, so far as you are concerned, my Christian name. I like calling you by yours, and I hope you will call me by mine."

"Louisa?" I said, half timidly.

"Louisa! Who's that? Oh! you mean Louisa Jones. My dear, you do not suppose that is my name, do you?"

Before I could answer she added :

"I was married in that name, but it is not mine. You see all we wanted was secrecy, and Henry had his reasons and I had mine. My real name," she added, looking at me with a smile, "is Elizabeth; but I have never been loved enough to be called Bessie. I have been and shall be Elizabeth to the end of the chapter. So whilst you are Bessie to me, I can be Elizabeth to you."

"Elizabeth what?" was on the tip of my tongue, but I had grace enough to restrain the question. And Mrs. de Lusignan volunteered no other information. Her maiden surname, her bringing up, her parentage, she was silent upon.

What I learned, I learned later, but not from her. There was nothing so very mysterious in her early history, nothing that she could not have told me then, if she chose. But that story was the key to the story of her marriage, and that she had resolved never to reveal to Mr. de Lusignan. She had reason for her reticence, but there was a good deal of perversity in it too.

She was called Elizabeth Clare, and that name was all she ever knew concerning her birth and origin. For all she could tell, her patrician beauty might have come down to her from a long line of fair ancestresses, or be the free gift of bountiful nature to the unacknowledged offspring of some wealthy churl. For Elizabeth was no poor man's child. Imperfect though her education was, money had been lavished upon it; and when she was removed from an expensive school at Highgate to the comfortable home of the lady under whose care she was placed, she received an income of three hundred a year, with the intimation that it would be continued till she married; then,

whether she became the wife of a peer of the realm, or of the poorest clerk who ever sat on a stool in an office, that income was to be forfeited, and the source from which it had flowed to go back for ever to its early darkness.

These were hard terms—terms which said all too plainly to the solitary girl, “ You shall never know from what stock you spring.” Little wonder was it that this stern and cold nurture should leave indelible traces on the character of Elizabeth—traces which often disappointed many whom her gracious beauty attracted. To me, when I knew her story, she seemed like a flower that springs from a barren rock—as lovely a thing as ever waved in the sweet Summer air ; but neither generous earth nor tender moisture feed its young roots, and so the sap of life does not always flow freely round its green heart. Nature had made her warm, generous, and loving, but her cold, unloved youth had warped these gifts. They could not be destroyed, but they were marred, and they often turned into bitterness, or went waste.

And so it was with all her qualities. They were precious and many, yet often they led her into error. She was brave, and had the gift of reserve, rare in one so young; but her courage became recklessness when she married a penniless man, and her reserve was almost guilty reticence when she withheld from him the knowledge that by that marriage she forfeited her income. Some will blame her for continuing to receive that income when her legal claim to it was over; but if she allowed the solicitor through whom it came to her to believe that, though she called herself Mrs. Smith, and was the mother of a child, she was yet no man's wife, her motive was not sordid, but heroic. She endured shame, and would have endured all the hardships of poverty, had there been need to do so, to keep inviolate and unbroken the faith of secrecy she had pledged to the dead.

But all this I did not know then. I only knew that Mr. de Lusignan's handsome daughter-in-law was called Elizabeth, and that the queenly name suited well her stately beauty. I

also knew that her father-in-law, whether through policy or inclination, or for both reasons, became at once her liege subject, and that Mademoiselle Aubrey—my dear Mademoiselle, as I used to call her—was a passive rebel. This seemed very strange to me—indeed, it was all the more unaccountable that Mrs. Henry de Lusignan laid herself out in a hundred ways to please her. Mr. de Lusignan she treated in a very cool and offhand manner, now and then contradicting him flatly, for no reason that I could see, setting him right without ceremony whenever he happened to be wrong, regarding his wishes as little as the barest politeness allowed, and altogether looking down at him *du haut de sa grandeur*, as I could not help telling her. She only laughed at the imputation.

“He does not complain, does he?” she asked, saucily.

“What would it avail him to complain?” was my reply.

“Nothing,” she answered, with a little short laugh. “He should have let me be quiet in Barbison, and not brought me here.”

But with Mademoiselle Aubrey there was nothing of this waywardness. To her Elizabeth's manner was all deference and softness. She heard her respectfully, never differed from her, and quietly did all she could to win her regard. She studied her tastes, found out what flowers she preferred, what books she liked best, and spared no pains to get them. She did far more. She only tolerated Mr. de Lusignan's fondness for little Harry, looked on with cold eyes at the tenderness he lavished upon him; but it was almost openly that she sought Mademoiselle Aubrey's affection for the child.

I remember one evening in the first week that followed the discovery of her secret, we were all seated in the garden enjoying the delicious freshness which had followed on a burning day. Mr. de Lusignan had lured Harry away, and was playing at hide-and-seek with him in the thickets, when Hermance came with a letter for him. I suppose he wanted to read it, and dismissed the child, for he came running towards us, flushed and warm, and ran into his mother's outstretched arms, laughing merrily. She took

and kissed him, then suddenly went and put him on Mademoiselle Aubrey's knees. She received him smilingly, and put down her book—but his mother was not content.

"Since you so loved the father," said Elizabeth, in a tone of gentle reproach, "why not love the son more than you do?"

"I do love him," answered Mademoiselle Aubrey, kissing his little olive cheek very fondly.

"As much as if he were his cousin's boy?" asked Elizabeth, looking down at her.

Mademoiselle Aubrey turned rather pale.

"You have no right to say that," she remarked, in a low tone. "The dead were not jealous."

"But I am both living and jealous," interrupted Elizabeth, a little impatiently. "I want more than I get for my boy and for me."

She said this so winningly that it was not in Mademoiselle Aubrey's heart to resist her. She smiled up in her face one of her kind, genial smiles, and she was going to say something very kind, no doubt, when my guardian came up to her with his open letter in his hand.

"Did you not tell me that you knew the Her-

berts?" he said, addressing his sister-in-law.

"No," she answered, after a moment's pause; "but I told you the other day, when we spoke about them, that I had heard the name mentioned by Bessie."

In a moment my guardian's brown eyes were full upon me. "To be sure," he said. "I remember now. They are cousins of yours, Mignonne, are they not?"

I shook my head.

"No, sir, I am not related to Mr. Herbert; but my cousin, James Carr, is, through his mother."

"Well, and what is he like?"

"I never saw him."

"Well, but what does your cousin say that he is like? Don't be stingy, child! I happen to want to know all about the Herbarts just now."

"There is only one—he is the last left of the family—so James Carr says."

"You don't believe that, do you, Mignonne?" good-humouredly said my guardian. "The last of an old name is always an invention of poets and novelists. There is never a really

lost one of the family in every-day life. Some other fellow always turns up."

"But, indeed," I argued, "James ought to know, for they are cousins and friends, and James was always telling me something or other about him."

"My dear, I again entreat you not to be stingy!" pathetically remarked my guardian. "What does your estimable cousin say of his cousin?"

His bantering tone made me quite bold.

"Oh! that he is very handsome—wonderfully handsome!—to begin with. Very like his mother, who was a great Irish beauty, and who married old Mr. Herbert."

"My dear, I implore you to be lenient towards Mr. Herbert. I happen to know that he was not fifty when he married this Irish beauty."

"I did not know he was so young," I replied, trying to look innocent. "Well, he died soon after the present Mr. Herbert was born, and for some years mother and child lived with his guardian at a beautiful place called Warrensford. But one morning they were both missing,

and it was found that Mrs. Herbert had fled in the night with her boy. It seems that his guardian wanted to take him from her, and place him in some great public school, and that she had resolved the child should never leave her whilst she could keep him."

"Indeed!" drily said my guardian. "And pray where did this wise lady go to?"

"To Rome—where they remained some years. After that they travelled about, for Mrs. Herbert lost her health, and became so restless that she could never stay long anywhere. I believe they went all over the world. James used to call Mr. Herbert 'Sinbad the Sailor.'"

"Of course Mr. Carr is a traveller?" here put in Mrs. Henry de Lusignan.

"No," I answered, a little surprised. "Why should he be?"

"Oh! the sobriquet he bestowed on his friend made me conclude he was a great traveller—of the old school, perhaps, but still a great traveller."

Mr. de Lusignan laughed, and I felt a tightening at my throat. Why had Elizabeth

spoken than? I would ten times sooner she had said anything unkind of me, than of good, earnest James Carr. She might not believe that I loved him, but, by the pain her sighing tones gave me, I knew how very dear to me was my betrothed cousin.

"What next, Mignonne?" said Mr. de Lusignan, seeing that I was silent. "This Simbad the Sailor came back to England, I suppose?"

"Yes, when he was of age and his own master—free from his guardian's power, I mean—his mother and he both returned to England. It was then Mrs. Herbert died, and that James Carr and Mr. Herbert met again after so many years. Soon after James Carr saw him he called upon me at Kensington, and I remember his telling me how handsome young Herbert was, and how ignorant. His mother was a clever woman, but wilful and eccentric, and she never had her son taught but two things—riding and fencing."

"An epitome of an education, certainly," remarked Mr. de Lusignan. "Mothers do commit these mistakes, sometimes."

If this was a shaft aimed at Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, it fell harmless at her feet, and she let it lie there, without even deigning to pick it up.

“What next, Mignonne?” again asked my guardian.

“James Carr liked Mr. Herbert very much. He said he was not only handsome, but brave and truthful in a rare degree; but I think, for my part, that it was the story of Mr. Herbert’s dog that won James Carr’s heart.”

“A story of a dog!” remarked Elizabeth; “oh! do let us have it. I delight in stories of dogs. They are half of them made up,” she added, laughing, “but still I do like them.”

“But this is not a made-up story,” I insisted, “for James had it——”

“From Mr. Herbert, of course,” suggested Mr. de Lusignan.

“No, indeed,” I replied, a little warmly; “he had it from an eye-witness. Mr. Herbert is too modest to say such things of himself.”

“Why, what wonderful tale is this?”

It was my guardian who spoke.

“It is the tale of a brave heart,” I said,

daringly. I did not care much about this unknown Mr. Herbert, but James Carr was fond of him, and next to the pleasure of praising dear James, was that of winning golden opinions, if I could, for his friend.

“We are all attention, Mignonne,” kindly said Mademoiselle Aubrey.

“Well, it is not a long story, at all events. Mr. Herbert, his mother, and his dog, a great Newfoundland, were on board a steamer—on the Mediterranean, I believe, but I am not sure—when the dog, who was playing with his master, fell overboard.”

“Are you sure of that part of the story, Mignonne?” here perversely interrupted my guardian; “I consider it most difficult to fall overboard a steamer—for a dog, especially.”

“But he did fall overboard, sir,” I replied, rather warmly, “for if he had not fallen where would my story be?” Mr. de Lusignan confessed this was an unanswerable argument, and I was allowed to go on. “Well, the sea was calm, and the dog swam bravely alongside the steamer, but, of course, this could not last long.

His master ran up to the Captain, and asked him to stop the boat at once.

“‘Impossible,’ answered the Captain; ‘it is against my orders. I can only stop for a man overboard—but for a dog!’

“‘Oh, very well,’ said Mr. Herbert, and in a moment he had jumped overboard, and was swimming by the Newfoundland. Of course the boat was stopped, and master and dog were picked up—and there is the story.”

“Pretty, if true,” said Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, looking less interested than I had expected; but Mademoiselle Aubrey’s blue eyes were glistening.

“You were right, Mignonne,” she said. “This is the story of a brave heart.”

“And of a good swimmer,” remarked Mr. de Lusignan; “pity a fine young fellow like that should be so awfully ignorant, though.”

“Yes,” I replied, “James Carr was always lamenting it.”

“I suppose they were friends,” suggested Elizabeth, as if she had forgotten that I had said so.

"Yea, great friends," I answered, in my simplicity.

"Then Heaven save me from my friends, that is all," she retorted, with a short laugh.

"Ignorant, twenty-five, and tolerably rich; then he will go to the dogs," said my guardian coolly.

"Oh! I hope not," I replied eagerly. "James Carr is so fond of him, and says he is the finest fellow in the world."

"Mignonne," said Mr. de Lusignan, gravely, "the man who has no compulsory tasks to fill his life, no cultivated mind to give him an interest in the hundred things that are the resources of rich and educated men, that man inevitably deteriorates as he grows old. There is a trite old saying about the end of things, '*Finis coronat opus.*' True; but then it is also the end that spoils nine-tenths of the grand things of this world. The beginnings are glorious, the endings, woe betide us! are poor, mean, and contemptible. And so it is with human lives—the best end badly. Open biography, and tell me, if you can, what man ever

knew how to die at the right time. This Mr. Herbert has youth, beauty, and strength now—great gifts. What will remain of them when he is fifty ?—and being what he is, an uneducated, purposeless man, just tell me what will have supplied the want of these ? He will deteriorate—he must—he cannot help himself.”

“I hope not,” I said again ; “for indeed he has more than youth, beauty, and strength. He has a fine nature.”

“Ah ! to be sure ; he leaped into the sea to save his Newfoundland.”

“Yes, and he loved his mother. He fell ill with grief when she died, and not even her footstool has changed its place in her room.”

“There, there,” said my guardian, stretching out his hands deprecatingly. “I give in. Make a hero of him, by all means, Bessie. *C'est de votre âge.*”

The dew was beginning to fall. We all returned to the house, and spoke of Mr. Herbert no more.

I went up rather early to my room that evening. I wanted to write to James, so I

sat by my open window through the fading twilight, and I had not the heart to close it, even when it was night, and the moon, full, round, and solemn, rose above the slumbering trees, and looked in at me, casting a square of cold light on the polished floor.

Fair moon, so loved of the poets, you whose beauty cannot be marred by all the foolish things said and written about you, I can never imagine you to be a peopled world. Surely you are a dead planet, as this earth of ours, so living now, may be dead some day yet. Ay, the moon is a graveyard, where millions upon millions of generations lie sleeping. No wonder she looks so sad, so pale, as she climbs the sky, or vanishes down into the depths of our ether. Let her; we too may be the poet's moon of some fresher, more vigorous world than this, some world now rolling empty in space, still untenanted, still waiting for its Adam and its untempted Eve. May they be wiser than our first parents were; may their children be less tired, less sorrowful than we are!

I am not sure, however, that these were the

speculations floating through my brain when dear Mademoiselle Aubrey came in upon me, asking me to thread her needle, and uttering an exclamation of wonder as she found me sitting without any light. I lit a candle at once, whilst my good friend sat down in an easy-chair, and though her needle was threaded, did not seem inclined to go.

"I am interrupting you," she said, glancing at my letter.

I hastened to answer that I could finish it tomorrow, and I shut up my blotting-case. She looked at me, leaning her cheek upon her hand, saying nothing, and still not going away.

"You are a trusting little thing," she said at length, "and I like you for it, Mignonne, but do not trust too much."

I could not help opening my eyes rather wide.

"You are a generous creature," she continued; "you give much, and ask for nothing in return. But as the world goes, Mignonne, it is not wise."

I felt my eyes opening wider than ever.

"Indeed I give little or nothing," I said hastily; "indeed I am afraid I am rather stingy."

"Indeed," she remarked, with her kindest smile, and rising she took my hand, and looked into my face still very kindly.

"You must not think," she said, "that I think Mrs. Smith—Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, I mean—could ever betray a trust that you or any one would repose in her."

"Of course not," I replied, eagerly. "Of course you never meant that."

"I did not," she rejoined, gravely. "Nor did I mean that she would receive affection and not give you affection in return. She has a warm, loving heart."

"Oh! so loving," I rejoined, eagerly; for I had been afraid that Mademoiselle Aubrey had meant to imply the very reverse of this.

"A loving heart," she said again; "but one that has suffered, and that has learnt to suffer in silence. You must allow for that, Mignonne, or your heart will ache."

I did not answer. Indeed, I did not know

what to say, nor what was my friend's meaning.

"Did it not strike you," she remarked, "that she knew quite as much about that Mr. Herbert as you told us."

"Oh! that is impossible," I said, eagerly.

"And you do not think she knew the story of the dog?"

"Dear Mademoiselle, it was she who asked me to tell it."

I suppose this was an unanswerable argument, for Mademoiselle Aubrey bade me a good night. She opened my door, and there, on the landing, stood Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, with a book and some lovely roses in her hand. She could not have heard a word that we had uttered, for we had both spoken low; yet I gave a guilty start, and I saw her beautiful face flush all over; but she smiled.

"They have just come," she said—"the book and the tea-roses; and, seeing your door open, I was going to put them into your room."

"Like a fairy," replied Mademoiselle Aubrey, smiling in her face, and looking at her very kindly.

The lime infaring had smothered her at the heart, and these roses silenced her. If not for ever, yet for many a day.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



